APRIL 1956

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The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE CHURCH AND DIVORCE

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GENTLEMEN:

For some time, now, we have been hearing a great deal of talk about a Calvinistic University. Many of our people apparently feel, in a nebulous, aimless sort of way, that we ought to have a university of our own. The problems involved in the organization of such an institution have, however, seemed so formidable as to deter any concrete action. Consequently, it was good to read, in your January 1956 issue, the article by Dr. W. H. Jellema. Here at last, I believe, are some sound, practical suggestions for getting the university movement off the ground.

No doubt, the program suggested by Dr. Jellema will be subject to modification once the work gets under way, but his plan for a system of checks and balances involving Senate, Overseers, and Trustees strikes me as a particularly happy one, one in which a university atmosphere could be expected to flourish. Further, Dr. Jellema's plan is the only safe one. An ever-present danger in affairs of this kind is the possibility that in a burst of cultural enthusiasm some group or groups should begin a movement which, by its very enthusiasm, would produce an academic monstrosity. An improperly conceived university would be far worse than no university at all. It would be an inter-denominational tragedy if, in the emotionally-charged atmosphere of a centennial celebration, we should succumb to the temptation to do something big and begin handing out graduate degrees which would not be current in the academic world. Such a possibility will not materialize if the program outlined by Dr. Jellema is followed. But the time to act is *now*, before a less satisfactory plan catches the fancies and emotions of our people. A Calvin Institute of Advanced Studies, based on principles of

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Admission Into the Church — Right or Favor?

by James Daane

A CHURCH bringing a convert to Christ is obliged to grant him baptism and to receive him into her fellowship. This obligation is grounded in the truth that (1) he who believes must be baptized, and (2) in offering Christ in gospel proclamation, the church thereby also offers herself. Because God has joined faith to baptism, and because God has so joined Christ to the Church that the Church cannot offer Christ without offering herself, no church bringing a convert to Christ is permitted to refuse him baptism and reception into her membership. Any church which does, tears asunder what God has joined together, and by her refusal to accept such a convert into the fellowship of her love, betrays that she does not really mean what she says when in the gospel she offers Christ to the sinner. Such a refusal would mean that a church is refusing to be the Church. By such refusal a church would also obscure and deny the truth about herself, which is to obscure the truth of the gospel itself, for the truth about herself is, as the Apostles' Creed shows, a part of the Faith which she believes and proclaims. It is only by granting baptism and reception into her membership to any convert which she under God brings to Christ, that the Church lives by the Truth she proclaims and is indeed true to what she claims to be: the Church, the Body of Christ, the fellowship of his love. This was the thesis of my former article (*Reformed Journal*, March 1956).

When Prudence Is Dangerous

If this then is the divine obligation under which the Church stands and which she must humbly accept in obedience to her Lord if she is to be true to herself (to her own nature!) and to the gospel she proclaims, then no practical difficulties or dangers which stem (or seem to stem) from such obedience ought to deter her from humbly accepting this divine obligation under which she stands. Neither the desire to avoid difficulties, nor the fear

A NOTE ABOUT THE SPECIAL ISSUE —

History, it has been said, can be cited in support of anything, and therefore it proves nothing. There is wisdom in this remark. History is neither the source nor the standard of truth. But history is important, and knowledge of it is indispensable to a man who wants to attain a perspective upon things and get them into focus. In order to assist the readers of the *Journal* to get into focus a problem that has engaged the mind of the Church for many decades now, we are placing (see page 9) an historical piece by Dr. George Stob on the problem of Divorce and Remarriage, or better, on the problem of Repentance in relation to unbiblically divorced and remarried persons. The piece is long, but no longer, we think, than the matter demands. To accommodate it we have, with the gracious cooperation of our publisher, increased the number of pages in this issue to thirty-two, which is eight more than the new *Journal* will ordinarily provide. We hope that by this special provision our readers will find themselves well served. —*The Editors.*

Admission into the Church –Continued

of dangers, nor the desire for a pure church, nor the desire to avoid disciplinary action, nor the desire to avoid accepting some who might later become backsliders, nor the desire for a church in which all members are of high spiritual quality, *none of these* ought ever to tempt a church to be disobedient to the obligation under which she is placed by God. To avoid succumbing to such temptation a church must ever be alert to the danger of allowing her practical wisdom and prudence, and her own "fine religious aspirations and desires" to beguile her into disobedience. No practical difficulties should ever tempt her to follow the light of her own wisdom and practical prudence and refuse baptism and admittance to him whom God through her mission effort has brought to Christ. To bring converts to Christ and then to accept this one into fellowship and exclude that one, to grant baptism to this one and deny it to that one, in order to have a church of such high quality that there will be few disciplinary cases and few backsliders — that is to be wiser than God, who through the foolishness of preaching grants baptism to the worst of believing sinners and receives them into the fellowship of his own love. The desire to be a "pure church" by these means: by refusing to accept those whom we have led to accept Christ (and to be accepted by him!) is not an honest attempt to be a "pure church." It is a refusal to be the Church. Led astray by her fears, misguided by her own very human prudence and fine religious aspirations and desires, such a church is "playing church" rather than being the Church. Beguiled into disobedience to her Lord by her own Church-ideal, by her own ideas about the Church and by what she thinks is safe for the Church she, alas! rather than being the ideal Church, becomes sectarian.

A Pleasant Uniformity

Our churches are all pretty much of the same quality. Most of us find this most agreeable and pleasant. It enables our members to feel religiously at home in any of our churches. It also takes much of the risk out of calling ministers. Thanks to the uniform doctrinal and religious quality of our ministry, a congregation can call an unknown minister and still know — so far as general religious position is concerned — what kind of minister it is calling. This over-all uniformity of quality, of both churches and ministers, is not only a pleasant thing but, in so far as the quality is good, a good thing.

Now it can hardly be denied that this pleasant and valuable uniformity would be threatened and to an extent even lost, if the Lord would use us mightily for bringing our unchurched neighbors to Christ. Though his conversion be ever so genuine, the average American will not overnight suddenly possess the same quality of religious commitment and attitude as that which characterizes the membership of our churches. His genuine conversion to Christ does not carry with it a sudden and automatic acceptance of those religious commitments and ethical patterns which make up our particular "quality." What we have acquired over generations is not given a convert in a moment of regeneration. Even a long period of doctrinal training prior to the granting of baptism and reception in the church will not solve the whole problem. For the "quality" of our membership is more than a matter of subscription to sound doctrine; it is also a matter of religious mood and outlook, of a particular kind of commitment, of a peculiar kind of religious mentality, and of a quality of spirit that is more Continental than American. This thing then that we mean by "quality," and which so uniformly characterizes our churches today, would in some real degree be lost (though other fine qualities might also be added) if the Lord used us in a large way in bringing our neighbors to Christ. Think of what would happen to some of our neighbors — besides an actual conversion — before they would "fit in"!

Three Alternatives

As our churches increasingly do the work of the evangelist with their American neighbors, the alternatives are becoming increasingly clear. We can choose to continue to be an instrument of missions only in places more or less remote from our congregational addresses, where converts in any number will not affect the uniform quality of our churches. (Our distinctive denominational problems and positions, for example, divorce, amusements, Catechism preaching, double Sunday church attendance, are not likely to be affected by any foreseeable influence or vote of churches we may plant in Africa, Japan or New Mexico.) But this has already given us a guilty conscience.

A second alternative we could choose to follow is that of addressing the gospel to our neighbors, and then selecting out of the converts we lead to Christ only those of highest quality (which here means blending in with the prevailing quality of our churches) for baptism and admittance, and refusing baptism and admittance to converts of lesser quality, dispatching them to churches of similar quality. As is well known, this position has its spokesmen who advocate this as a policy which will protect and insure the continued high quality of our

churches. There are, however, a growing number of people in our churches who view such an insurance policy with increasing alarm, for upon reading the fine print they have discovered that the policy rests on the contention that a church may presume to herself the right to grant or withhold baptism and church membership to converts she has brought to Christ, the right to tear asunder what God has joined together, namely, faith and baptism, and the right to offer Christ while withholding herself. There is a growing awareness that such positions and such behavior ill become the Church of Christ for they bespeak a spiritual pride that is unbecoming to those who confess that they themselves have been saved from the depths of sin only by the blood of Christ and that even now, after many years of membership in the church, they themselves have but the smallest beginning of that love and obedience which their Lord requires. There is a growing awareness that the New Testament knows *nothing* of a variety of grades among converts which qualify some and not others for baptism and church membership. And there is finally a growing awareness that the different levels of spiritual quality which mark converts to Christ may never be turned into prerequisites for obtaining baptism, nor into conditions for obtaining church membership. It was Nietzsche not Paul that enjoined the despisal of the weak. Paul commanded the Church at Rome: "Him that is weak in faith receive ye." In short, there is a growing conviction that no church has a right — not even for the noble purpose of maintaining her own high spiritual quality and standards — to boast that she is a church only of the strong in faith, a church only for those of superior spiritual quality, and that therefore of the converts she brings to Christ she has a right to accept only those of similar strength and quality. It is all too evident that such protective devices and safety insurance policies are born of a terrible spiritual pride and nourished by the greatest arrogance. Consequently, many are beginning to see that such policies do not protect but rather destroy a church's genuine spirituality.

There is one other alternative. It is the only one that breathes the spirit of the gospel and expresses the nature and the calling of the Church. It is the granting of baptism to and the admittance into her membership of every convert a church brings to Christ.

Not a Free Pass for "Anybody and Everybody"

I have never seen this position opposed on biblical grounds, though it has frequently enough been opposed by fear, the fear of what will happen to our churches and their standards if we accept every convert we lead to Christ. When this objection is raised, one is beholding a lack of faith that Christ through his Word and Spirit is capable of taking care of his Church. One is also beholding the substitution of fear for biblical demand, and the attempt of men to take the place of the Lord in order to do what the Lord has seemingly failed to do, namely, provide adequate protections for the safety of his Church. In order to hide that this is what is actually taking place, a smokescreen is sometimes created by charging that the position I here advocate is one which would "receive just anybody and everybody into the Church."

Quite the opposite is true. I advocate that we take *converts* (those that we bring to Christ) and *only* converts into the Church, but that we take every such convert regardless of the *relative* quality of his spirituality, and regardless of whether he is highly or less highly indoctrinated. All this has absolutely nothing to do with accepting "anybody and everybody" into the membership of the Church. Those whom a church must admit are those concerning whom a consistory, after careful appraisal, dare not make the judgment that they are not Christian.

This position has, therefore, nothing in common with the argument that a church will then "let everybody or almost everybody in." But it does forthrightly reject the position that we must select only the higher quality convert, since some of the lower quality converts — so the argument goes — might later require discipline, or backslide, or might eventually prove to have never been converted at all. It rejects this position not only as arrogant but as utterly irresponsible. May a church forbid the waters of baptism and exclude from membership all the less-than-high-quality converts in order to forestall cases of backsliding and discipline and thus insure its uniformly high quality? May a church exclude some of the lambs of Christ in order to insure that it will have as few discipline cases as possible? May a church take *such* precautions to avoid the risk and the work of disciplinary action? Is this not to advocate that the Church neglect her task and become utterly irresponsible? Certainly it is pleasant to be a member or a minister in a church of such high spiritual quality that relatively little disciplinary action is necessary, but the first task of the Church is to be the Church, not to create a pleasant situation for its members and churchmen! Does a church show honor and respect to the Church of Christ when for her own self interests she sends her inferior converts to other churches of Christ?

Admission into the Church -Continued

Having the Courage of Our Convictions

The task of a church in this matter would seem to be clear enough: the acceptance of any true convert she brings to Christ. And if some ask for baptism and church membership whose spiritual quality is such that we cannot in good conscience accept them, then we ought to have the courage of our convictions and declare plainly that in our judgment they are not Christians and ought not to seek baptism and membership *in any church.* (And we ought to have the same courage respecting unbiblically divorced and remarried people. If we judge that they are sincere and repentant Christians, we ought to accept them — and if not, then we ought not, as is so often done! recommend that they join some other church [the more orthodox the better!] but have the courage to say that in their present situation they have no right to membership in any church!) The fact that we often lack such conviction regarding both unbiblically divorced and remarried people and the so-called inferior quality convert, indicates that we have more concern for *our* church than for the Church of Christ. Why should the blemish which such people are said to be on a church, be less serious on the Church of Christ elsewhere, than on our churches? This question is never answered because it cannot be answered without betraying that the concern is for something other than Christ's Church. It is at this point that the specter of sectarianism begins to arise in our position and policy. We must come to recognize that a concern for our churches which is either more or less than a concern for the Church of Christ, is something other than a genuine concern for Christ's Church. A concern for our church which is not identical with a concern for the Church of Christ is a private, provincial, sectarian concern, one for which we ought to allow no room. This means that we as churches may adopt no policy or attitude toward any convert, which we would not want every other church to adopt. The attitude and policy of accepting only the high quality converts and rejecting the lower quality thus stands condemned, for if it were right then every church ought to adopt it, but if every church did then the majority of Christians would be deprived of baptism and of membership in a church. Which is but to say that any policy — practiced by whatsoever church — which lays down a condition for church membership which would exclude many true converts — and perhaps the majority! — is obviously a policy which will be repudiated by all who have a genuine concern for the Church of Christ. The one and only condition that may be laid upon the convert by the church which brought him to Christ, *is true conversion to Christ.* And this condition of membership must be so used as to serve the negative function of keeping unbelievers out of the church, and the positive function of granting baptism and admission into the church, not to some, but to *all* converts.

Confusing the Condition of Admittance with Matters of Discipline

When a condition of membership is made to serve a positive function other than that of admitting the true convert, namely, that of keeping some of the converts a church leads to Christ out of her fellowship, then the condition of membership serves a *disciplinary* function. When, for example, a Reformed church makes the condition for acceptance of a Baptist his acceptance of infant baptism, the condition of membership in this instance serves a disciplinary function. This is indeed legitimate; indeed, it is nothing more than a serious reckoning with the factualities of denominationalism. For this Baptist is a member of a (Baptist) church. As a church member he can rightly be made to feel the edge of discipline should he desire membership in, and the rights of communion, in a Reformed church. But the matter is quite different with respect to a new convert that we ourselves have brought to Christ. The only condition of membership that may be laid upon him is true faith and repentance. It is wholly illegitimate to lay upon him other or higher conditions for membership, for example, that he must be of a certain high spiritual quality. The application of such other and higher conditions for baptism and membership would be to apply disciplinary measure against him who as yet is no church member. This application of disciplinary measures to the new-born convert prior to actual baptism and church membership, *i.e.*, the insistence that he measure up to certain high spiritual standards before he will be granted baptism and admission into the church, may indeed eliminate in advance possible future disciplinary action, but it is a policy which is wholly indefensible. It deprives the convert of that which the church has no right to deprive him.

The insistence by a church that the new convert she brought to Christ meet all the spiritual conditions — the absence of which might later involve him in disciplinary action — *before* he will be given baptism and admittance into the church is wholly without justification. A church has no right to discipline a convert who is not yet a member, one who has not yet enjoyed the benefits the church

has to offer for his spiritual growth: baptism, regular preaching and instruction, holy communion. This is a reversal of all good order and sense. Deny such a convert the means of grace (baptism and communion) and insist that before he has the opportunity to use these means that he be spiritually so mature and of such high quality that there is little likelihood that he will require disciplinary action after baptism and admission — in the interests of maintaining the uniformly high quality prevailing in the church! — this is a complete confusion of the nature and task of the Church. If we would apply this to our own children none of our children would be church members, and none would be baptized as infants. It is indeed the most confused kind of thinking when the advocates of the policy of high spiritual quality urge that we do apply this policy to our children and therefore ought to apply it to converts. The truth is the exact opposite. We baptize babies and insist that they are members of Christ's church, even though they may become disciplinary cases later on. A church which would maintain such a policy toward the new convert which it has just brought to Christ would by the very maintenance of her policy clearly announce that she herself did not possess that high quality of spirituality and that sound indoctrination in the Truth which she demands of the new-born convert, and of which she herself so proudly boasts!

I have no argument to support the idea that membership in the church and in the Masonic Lodge is compatible. But if a Mason were by our instrumentality brought to conversion and faith in Christ, non-membership in the Masonic Order should not be made a condition for membership. Such a thing is a matter for discipline — and also, if necessary, a matter for discipline in due time for the new convert! *i.e.*, after he has had ample time to rid himself with the help and prayers of the church of the idea — one which is so widely accepted by so many Christians that we can hardly expect him to see our point of view immediately — that such membership is compatible with allegiance to Christ. Such a procedure would give him an opportunity to grow in grace and understanding, and would also give the church an opportunity to work with such a Christian (which now rarely happens in our churches). This would indeed rob us of the boast that to the best of our knowledge there is not a single lodge member in our churches. But the loss of the right to make this boast would be small price to pay for the opportunity of giving the new convert a fair opportunity to come to understand the nature of his affiliation, for the opportunity to work with such erring Christians, and for that free and good conscience of not being wiser than our Lord by turning matters of discipline into conditions of membership. By injecting the element of discipline into the conditions we lay down for church membership, we may relieve ourselves quite automatically of exercising the task of discipline, and also make it possible to boast that there is not to our knowledge a lodge member in the whole denomination, but we have no more right to do that than have the Seventh Day Adventists to make a ten-percent tithe a condition for church membership. In either instance it is a sectarian rather than a churchly policy.

Who Is a Genuine Convert?

Some will contend that if a convert is unwilling, for example, to give up membership in the Masons, he shows that he is not a Christian, that his repentance is not sincere. This may indeed be true in some instances. If it is apparent that the convert is quite clearly aware that church and Masonic membership is incompatible and he still insists on his retention of the latter, what then? Then the consistory must simply make the judgment that he is not a genuine convert — and then declare that he has no right to membership in a Christian Reformed, *nor in any other church!* But where this incompatibility is not understood and membership therefore not immediately terminated, a church has no right to insist on its immediate termination as a condition of membership. Billy Graham may insist that Stu Hamblen not only give up horse racing but sell his stable of horses before his conversion will be accepted as genuine. It may even be regarded as good psychology that a convert prove his sincerity by surrendering something in itself good and permissible, but it hardly has biblical warrant. But to return to the point. A new convert does not necessarily reveal insincerity because he does not immediately conform to the higher standards which may be rather uniformly accepted and maintained by long-time church members. In modern Christendom it might well be urged that having more than one wife or possessing slaves would be an evidence of insincerity of repentance. Yet in Paul's day it was not so regarded. While Paul would not approve of the institution of slavery or the possession of two wives, yet Paul did not insist that "one wife" and "no slaves" were necessarily proofs of sincerity and therefore conditions to be met before the new convert could be allowed baptism and admission into the church. Because the evil institutions of bigamy and slavery were so widely accepted as legitimate, neither the New Testament church, nor Paul himself, insisted on their renunciation prior to baptism

and church membership, even though neither having more than one wife nor the purchase and holding of slaves could be regarded as high quality spirituality, nor as the maintenance of high standards. Since lodge membership is today largely regarded — even by most churches — as compatible with church membership (how surprised most people are by our anti-lodge position!), the refusal on the part of the new convert immediately to give up his lodge membership cannot in every case be regarded as proof of the insincerity of his profession of faith. Consequently, making the principle of no lodge members in Christian Reformed Churches a condition for membership for any and all converts cannot be justified. For when a principle of church discipline and of possible excommunication is applied to one whom the church judges to be a Christian, albeit an erring one, for the purpose of keeping the erring Christian from baptism and church membership, and thereby excludes him from possible legitimate church discipline later on, everything is turned into confusion.

A church bringing a convert to Christ is not allowed to turn her reasons for discipline into conditions for membership. Assuming that the ten-percent tithe is a New Testament demand (which it is not) that church which makes the promise of the ten-percent tithe a condition of church membership for new converts is in error. Or again, assuming that smoking is sinful, those churches which make non-smoking a condition of membership for new converts commit the same error. And we commit the same error when we make the doing or not doing of certain things which we think rightly may call for discipline and even possible excommunication, conditions of membership for converts. This was one of the serious errors contained in the instructions on how to do neighborhood evangelization given some years ago to our churches. They were instructed not to accept a convert for baptism and church membership who did not, for example, agree with our stand on card-playing. The churches were advised that such converts either were not Christians at all, or were the kind that we can do without! Here we see to what terrible unchristian conclusions we are led when we turn matters of discipline into conditions of membership. By confusing the former with the latter, we are led to the conclusion that he whom we brought to Christ and judged as a true convert is, because he will not give up card-playing, judged to be either no Christian at all, or the kind of Christian convert we as churches — even though we brought him to Christ — can afford to do without! If a church so confuses matters of discipline with conditions of membership that it can advise churches that it can well do without the converts they themselves have brought to Christ, then confusion reigns indeed — and over very important matters!

The More Excellent — and More Difficult! — Way

A position which urges that we may, nay *must*, select from those whom we bring to Christ only those of high quality, and reject for baptism and admission the convert of inferior quality (a position I am sure which receives more honor in words than in practice) does indeed make matters very simple. Alas, all too simple! It not only makes room for the boast that there are no lodge members, no card players, no movie goers, etc. in Christian Reformed churches. It also relieves these churches from facing many problems with pastoral care and ministrations. It places Christians who need these things most, outside the reach of the ministrations of these churches — and in this dubious way enables these churches to maintain their uniform high quality. Yet the relief and simplification is purchased at too great a price: one which tears asunder faith and baptism, alters the biblical condition for membership in Christ's church, thrusts a church in her mission efforts into the impossible contradiction of offering Christ while withholding herself, beclouds the truth about the Church, obscures and hinders her task, and fosters that haughty, spiritual arrogance, inherent in all sectarianism, which prevents the church from being the Church in actual practice.

The position I have recommended as the only one which breathes the air of the gospel and the Spirit of Christ is a very simple one: a church bringing a convert to Christ must grant him baptism and admission into her fellowship. But it is not simple to put into practice. It will call, not for less, but for *more* spiritual discernment and judgment, more care, more love, more disciplinary action, more pastoral prayers and ministrations. But these I think are all the proper work of the Church. And it is not by evading these (not even for what we think to be most prudent reasons and noble objectives), but only by their humble acceptance and willing performance that the church can and will be the Church in actual practice.

A convert has a right to receive baptism from and admission into the church that brought him to Christ. These are not favors which that church may choose to bestow or not bestow. If she bestows them as favors only upon her favorite converts, she thereby surrenders the right to the claim that she is the Church.

The Christian Reformed Church and the Problem of Divorce

by George Stob

THE TITLE of this article will seem old and familiar to people in the Christian Reformed Church. It could fit any of the last forty-two years of the church's life. For all of these forty-two years the question of the membership status of people divorced and remarried has been a "problem." For all of these forty-two years the church has carried within her bosom two irreconcilable opinions on the question — the opinion that those guilty in divorce and remarriage cannot be members of the church while continuing in the second marriage, and the opinion that they can be members with retention of that marriage if they evidence repentance and renewal of life. For all of these forty-two years the official and governing position of the church has been that of the first opinion mentioned above. For all of these forty-two years this position has been maintained uncertainly, and has been repeatedly challenged by question, protest, and the church's own frequent appointment of committees to study the problem.

One may wonder why a church should wrestle with a problem so long, without coming to some measure of satisfactory resolution of it. The difficulty is not in the problem as such. Scripture gives clear enough light on all moral problems, including those of divorce and marriage, for us to find a workable Scriptural answer. Our sister churches in the Netherlands and South Africa have fully resolved the problem for their own life more than thirty-three years ago, and have given us the benefit of their study and conclusions.

What, then, accounts for the distressing persistence of the "divorce problem" in the Christian Reformed Church? It may be that the biggest ingredient of the divorce problem in the Christian Reformed Church is the church herself. In view of that possibility, it will be well to make a survey and study of the church's relation to the problem of divorce.

The history of the church's dealings with the problem of divorce and remarriage may be divided into four periods.

I. The first period, extending from 1857 to 1912, is the period of unreasoned and unsupported declaration, and uncritical and unquestioning acceptance, of the position that those who sinned in divorce and remarriage cannot be members of the church while the original marriage partner lives. In this period the so-called "historic stand of 1890-1908" was fixed.

II. The second period, extending from 1912 to 1936, is the period of challenge to, questioning of, protest against, and intensive study of the church's position on the membership of those divorced and remarried.

III. The third period, extending from 1936-1946, is the period of contradiction and confusion in the church's position, ended by vigorous reassertion and application of it.

IV. The fourth period, extending from 1947 to the present, is the period in which the historic position of the church was revised, restored, and finally questioned by the church herself as to its Scriptural foundation.

I. The "Historic Stand" Established (1857-1912).

Decisions Without Grounds

The Christian Reformed Church was organized in April 1857 after the secession of four churches from Classis Holland and the Dutch Reformed Church. In February 1858 the new little church dealt with her first divorce problem. It concerned a woman who had obtained a divorce from her husband, because he insisted on returning to the Netherlands. She subsequently remarried. Two children were born in the second marriage. When the question came to the Classis (then the broadest assembly), it was decided that the woman and her second husband must separate, or else be excommunicated. The two children were to be baptized, however, and the grandfather, a retired elder, was to present them for baptism. (*Classis Meeting,* Feb. 3, 1858, Art. 6).

In April 1870, it was decided that a woman divorced on the grounds of extreme cruelty might not become a member of the church. Her child, however, might be baptized if presented for baptism by the grandparents. (*Ibid.*, April 7, 1870, Art. 14). In June 1875 the General Assembly declared that a man who remarried after his wife had divorced him might not be a "member, candidate for membership ('leerend lid'), or a baptized member." (*Minutes, General Assembly,* June 2ff, Art. 35).

In another instance it was decided that a man who had married a woman who had been deserted for more than 20 years, there being no proof her first husband had died, might not become a member of the church. (*Ibid.*, June 6ff, 1877, Art. 40). In none of these instances were any grounds of any kind given for the decisions made.

The Historic Stand of 1890-1908

Of particular interest is the decision of the Synod of 1890, which, along with the explanation of the Synod of 1908, makes up the "historic stand" of the Christian Reformed Church on the membership status of those divorced and remarried. Article 66 of the *Acts* of the Synod of 1890 reads: "May a man divorced legally by his wife because of adultery, if he again marries while his first wife lives, be a member of the church? The Synod answers negatively." No grounds were given for this judgment.

In 1908 Classis Grand Rapids West "urgently requested Synod for a statement of the grounds" for that decision of 1890. The Synod of 1908 declared she could do no more than state what she herself would consider adequate grounds for such a decision. The following statement was thereupon presented and adopted:

> "Such a man cannot be a member of the church, because his adultery freed his aggrieved (beleedigde) wife, but not him. He nonetheless remained bound to that wife before God, and his second marriage is therefore a living in adultery. If this were not so, the way would be open for anyone to be freed from his lawful wife by adultery and to marry another, who is the object of an adulterous desire, and still remain at peace with the church by becoming reconciled to the church by public confession after everything had occurred with godless design. The point of the divine ordinance — Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, commiteth adultery — would then be negated; it would be robbed of its force. After the fashion of the Scribes a way would be found to escape God's command; and a decision that such a person could be a member of the church would have the character of a ruling through which God's command is made powerless." (*Acts* 1908, Art. 54, p. 39).

This declaration was the only definitive statement of position by which the church was governed until a new statement was adopted in 1947. Concerning this "historic stand" of 1890-1908, it may be observed:

1. That it concerned only the case of the guilty party in a biblical divorce (*i.e.*, one divorced on account of his own adultery). No reasons were given for the position that one divorced on unbiblical grounds and subsequently remarried cannot be a member of the church. This, perhaps, was considered self-evident and wholly beyond question.

2. That basic to the position of 1890-1908 is a large, unsupported assertion, namely, that the guilty party in a biblical divorce is not freed from his first wife, either by his adultery or the resulting divorce, but "nonetheless remain [s] bound to that wife before God."

3. That no particle of Scriptural evidence is advanced for this position. The whole argument is the "argument from fear of consequences." This argument is carried so far in this instance that an ecclesiastical regulation is considered essential for preserving the point and power of the Word of God.

It is remarkable that a position with so little substance, and so lacking in Scriptural evidence or reasonable argument, could have remained the church's official position and the central point of reference for so long a period of time.

Early Exception to the Rule

One interesting exception to the rigorous position of the church was allowed in 1904. A woman, herself being sued for divorce by a worthless husband, filed a cross-bill and obtained divorce on the grounds of extreme cruelty. After her first husband had remarried, she also remarried, but not without first getting favorable advice from two ministers of the church, one of whom performed the ceremony. All this occurred with the knowledge and apparent acquiescence of her consistory. When her membership was transferred without prejudice to another church, the rightfulness of her second marriage was challenged. Classis Grand Rapids East declared, for various reasons, that she and her second husband should not be molested.

When the matter was appealed to the Synod of 1904, Synod judged the arguments of Classis East invalid. Synod ruled, however, that since the consistory of her former church acquiesced in her divorce action and transferred her in good standing to another church, and since two ministers had advised her that she might remarry, the woman and her husband should be tolerated as members of the congregation, and that no more might be required of the woman than that she confess to having erred because of wrong guidance and counsel. (*Acts* 1904, Art. 137, pp. 53-55).

This ruling was an exception in a concrete case, but did not involve the sacrifice of the general position that those who were guilty of divorce and remarriage could not be members of the church while remaining married. That position continued undisturbed until 1912, when it came for the first time under serious question.

II. The "Historic Stand" Under Continuous Challenge (1912-1936).

The Opening Wedge

In the year 1912 the church of Alpine Avenue, Grand Rapids, requested that "Synod approve the Consistory's decision to admit into the full com-

munion of the church, E. F., a person divorced from his wife and married to a divorcee, but now come to repentance and turning." Synod simply declared the request out of order, "since it is not within the province of Synod to approve the decisions of a Consistory." (*Acts* 1912, Art. 62 (4), p. 51).

It is worth noticing that this case was obviously brought to Synod in order to test the church's stand. Dr. J. Van Lonkhuyzen, an ardent disciple of Dr. Abraham Kuyper, and who had just come from the Netherlands in 1911, was the minister of Alpine Avenue. Just before the Synod of 1912 met he had written an article in *De Wachter,* indicating that this question was being put before Synod, and expressed the strong judgment that the church must accept the second marriage as valid, and receive into the membership of the church those who had confessed and repented of their sins. (*De Wachter,* June 19, 1912, pp. 4, 5). To this the Rev. J. Vander Mey later replied: "Could it be worse? Such a view belongs in a liberal church where men have no concern about the sacred things of the Lord, but there is no place for such a position in a Reformed Church!" (*Ibid.,* Aug. 28, 1912, p. 3).

In any event, this "liberal" view had a competent exponent in Dr. J. Van Lonkhuyzen, who showed a discerning knowledge of the Scriptural teaching on divorce and remarriage and of the judgments of Reformed scholars on the matter. Dr. Van Lonkhuyzen was the first significant critic of the church's "historic stand," and there has not been anyone since who has addressed himself more competently or discerningly to the issues at the heart of the question. By initiating ecclesiastical action in his own consistory, in Classis Grand Rapids West, and in Synod, as well as by his public writings, Dr. Van Lonkhuyzen drove in the opening wedge which was to lead to an ever widening and deepening breach in the church's traditional position.

A Twenty-Two-Years Long Question

When the question came again to the Synod of 1914, it became evident that the church herself had been led to a questioning and review of her "historic stand." At the Synod of 1914 Classis Muskegon asked "whether a woman divorced on grounds of extreme cruelty, and who remarried after her first husband had remarried, could be admitted to the membership of the church." Synod decided not to judge of the concrete case immediately, but rather to appoint a committee to study the whole matter and report to the next Synod. (*Acts* 1914, Art. 51, p. 38).

The question was put into even sharper focus by another communication from the Alpine Avenue Church. At the Synod of 1914 the Alpine Avenue Consistory called attention again to the case of Mr. E. F., but desired not only an expression on this concrete case, but also "such a change in our church's position, that adulterers, after having obtained grace, might again be honorably restored to the membership of the church even while remaining in the second marriage." The argument of Alpine Avenue may be summarized as follows: (1) Even though the church must disapprove every marriage entered into against Scriptural teaching, she must accept the *fact* of divorce and remarriage as existing by the sanction of the State. (2) When these persons come to repentance and public confession of sin, the church must acknowledge as fact the sanction of the State, and must receive these repentant sinners as members of the church even while they continue to live in the marriage which is valid, though begun in a sinful way.

The Advisory Committee recommended that Synod should abide by her position, on the ground that the second marriage was and continued to be a sinful one, and the church may not give place in her communion to a marriage that stands condemned by God. However, in view of the fact that a Committee had already been appointed to study the whole question, Synod decided not to enter further upon this concrete case, but refer it and the report of the Advisory Committee to the Study Committee which was to be appointed. The following were appointed as members of the first Study Committee on the membership status of those divorced and remarried: Prof. F. M. Ten Hoor, Dr. S. Volbeda, the Rev. J. Bruinooge, Prof. W. Heyns, Dr. J. Van Lonkhuyzen, Elder B. Sevensma, and the Rev. Henry Danhof. (*Ibid.,* Art. 68, pp. 73-76, Art. 75, p. 83).

It may be noted at this point that Synod's study continued indefinitely, and that no decisions were made in the concrete cases of Muskegon and Alpine Avenue until 1936 — twenty-two years later!

An Historic Study Committee Report

I call the report submitted to the Synod of 1916 an "historic" report because it occupies a tremendously significant place in the history of our divorce problem. It is significant for the following reasons:

1. The two diametrically opposed and wholly irreconcilable positions which have existed in the communion of the Christian Reformed Church are here set against each other in the sharpest and clearest focus.

2. All the essential considerations which bear on either side of the question were already brought to expression in this report. No really new arguments have been brought up on either side since 1916. The issues were clear-cut and courageously set forth in 1916.

3. The sharp difference between the two positions presented in the report of 1916, which was also reflected in the Synodical assembly of that year, led

The Church and Divorce — Continued

to the decision to place the question before the *Gereformeerde Kerken* of the Netherlands and South Africa and seek their advice.

The "Report of 1916" was really two radically divergent reports, each submitted by three members of the original committee. The Rev. J. Bruinooge, for some reason not disclosed, had not served on the committee.

Both groups agreed that the essential question was whether those who had obtained a divorce on grounds other than that of adultery, and thereafter remarried, could on certain conditions be received into the membership of the church; or whether they must be excluded from membership in our churches as long as they continue to live in the second marriage.

One report was submitted by Prof. F. M. Ten Hoor, Dr. S. Volbeda, and Prof. William Heyns. Their answer to the above question was that those divorced on unbiblical grounds and remarried could not be received into the membership of the church as long as they continue to live in the second marriage. Their position is represented in the following propositions:

(1) The person who is divorced on unbiblical grounds and remarried, continues to live in adultery as long as he remains in the second marriage. Every sexual act in that marriage is a new act of adultery, an act whereby he repeatedly sins anew against God, who forbids such relations with the second wife — since before God the first marriage remains unbroken.

(2) The sanction of the civil magistrate does not mean that such a marriage must be considered as valid in the sphere of the church.

(3) Those who thus live in adultery with each other may not be admitted to membership in the church upon confession of their sins. While they are married they live in adultery, and the church must hold to the Scripture which declares that adulterers have no part in the Kingdom of God.

(4) The persons concerned may put an end to this life of continual adultery by separation of bed and board, and by maintaining that separation during the life-time of the first wife, who is and remains the legal wife before God.

(5) Only when these conditions are met can their confession of sin be considered a sincere confession, one accompanied by sufficient evidences of repentance.

A second report, taking the quite opposite position, was submitted by Dr. J. Van Lonkhuyzen, Elder B. Sevensma, and the Rev. Henry Danhof. The position of this report may be summarized as follows:

(1) Marriage, though a creation ordinance of God, and for life, and therefore not to be broken, can nevertheless be *de facto* broken by the sinful action of men. It is broken by the act of adultery and divorce following. It is also broken by a divorce obtained on unbiblical grounds.

(2) Marriage and divorce are jurisdictional acts of the magistrate, who is a servant of God in the natural sphere. There is no marriage except by sanction of the State. The State gives legal existence to marriage, and also dissolves marriage by the civil act of divorce. That she sometimes does so out of wrong motives and in conflict with God's Word is her sin; but the *fact* is not on that account changed.

(3) Unbiblical divorce and remarriage must not be approved by the church. When members are guilty of these sins, they must be dealt with in respect of them. We must, nonetheless, accept such divorce and remarriage as existing facts, which can neither be denied or altered. Failure to do so is to impose on the province of the State. The church exercises the power of the keys. She may excommunicate a person who persists in sin. But she cannot and may not require of a repentant sinner a breaking of the relation established by the magistrate. Unbiblical divorce and remarriage are sinful, but nonetheless valid and binding — also for the church.

(4) Scripture itself reckons with and accepts *as facts* the sinful actions of the State. Moses allowed divorce and remarriage on grounds other than adultery, and gave them right of existence within society. Jesus did not condemn Moses. Pilate's condemnation of Jesus was sinful, but nonetheless was a fact in law in the sight of God. In this way, indeed, our sins were laid on Christ.

(5) The church may not require, as condition of re-admission into her membership, that the second marriage in question should be dissolved. The State could not dissolve it on good grounds, and the Scriptures do not require it. Neither may the church demand separation of bed and board. This assumes that marriage is merely or first of all a sexual relationship. This is not so. It is a legal relationship, and this is not suspended by separation of bed and board. To require separation of bed and board prevents those who have pledged themselves to each other in the second marriage from fulfilling their pledge, and would give occasion to all kinds of adulterous sins.

(6) When those who have sinned in these matters come to sincere sorrow, repent of their sins, and it appears to the Consistory after careful examination and a reasonable period of probation that a turning has indeed taken place, then the Consistory must, with the advice of Classis, receive these people upon their confession of sin without requiring dissolution of their marriage. To refuse such penitents is to abuse the power of the keys, and to deprive these penitents of that which they sorely need — the fellowship of the saints and the use of the holy sacraments.

Synod did not adopt the conclusions of either of these reports. It was decided, rather, that in view of the quite divergent conclusions found in these reports, and the apparent unreadiness of Synod to choose between them, the matter should be left in *statu quo,* but that meanwhile the advice of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands and South Africa should be sought.

Light — Sought, Given, and Put Under a Bushel

The question of the membership status of those divorced on unbiblical grounds and remarried was referred to the *Gereformeerde Kerken* of the Netherlands and South Africa for their advice.

This request for advice came to the 1917 Synod of the Netherlands churches (whose General Synods are held every three years). This Synod appointed a large and exceptionally able study committee, comprising such men as Dr. Herman Bavinck, Dr. H. H. Kuyper, A. Anema, F. W. Grosheide, J. H. Landwehr, H. Bouwman, J. Ridderbos, and B. Van Schelven. It was a committee of outstanding experts on Theology, Old and New Testament Exegesis, Church Government, Church History, and Civil Law.

After about three years of study, this committee reported to the Netherlands Synod of 1920. However, since there had not been enough time for study of this report, decision was deferred until the Synod of 1923. After three years of study by the *Gereformeerde Kerken* of the Netherlands, the Synod of Utrecht, 1923, officially adopted the conclusions of the study committee on the questions of the relation of the civil government to divorce, the position of the church with reference to civil divorce, and the position the church must take with reference to those who obtain unbiblical divorce and remarry. The Synod of Utrecht further decided "to send the aforementioned conclusions of the report as advice to the Christian Reformed Church in North America, together with the report, so that this Church may also learn to know the grounds upon which this advice rests." (*Agenda,* Chr. Ref. Church, 1930, I, p. 81, quoting *Acta,* Synode van Utrecht, 1923, Art. 91, p. 88).

The conclusions adopted by the Synod of Utrecht, and sent to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, were the following:

(1) "When, after a divorce disapproved by the Church, the State allows a new marriage, the Church must condemn such a marriage as a sinful act, and does not in any sense have to lend her offices (medewerking) to such a marriage."

(2) However, "the requirement that those thus married must abstain from every marriage relation does not find sufficient ground in Scripture, would impose too heavy a burden on the consciences, and would open the door to other and still greater sins."

(3) "Whenever members of the Church obtain a divorce in an improper way or on the ground of false representations, and as well whenever they subsequently enter upon a new marriage, the Church is most assuredly called upon to exercise discipline upon them."

(4) However, "when, after committing this sin, sorrow is manifest and the guilty ones desire to return to the fellowship of the Church, the Church — as in the case of every sin — can establish only the requirement that the sin should be confessed and sorrow concerning it should be manifest."

(5) "There would be reason for the Church to doubt the sincerity of such repentance only if the same sin of easy divorce and remarriage should thereafter be committed again." (*Ibid.*, pp. 81, 82, quoting from *Rapporten,* Synode van Utrecht, 1923, pp. 32, 34).

The South African churches sent the following advice in answer to the request of the Christian Reformed Church:

(1) "When, after illegal divorce as well as in the case of a new marriage following, the guilty persons confess their sins, then the Church must receive them into its communion when the sins have been confessed and repentance has been shown."

(2) "The uprightness of such repentance must not consist in this, that the new marriage be annulled, which would be fornication anew, but herein that sorrow is felt on account of the sinful step which had been taken. Doubt concerning repentance may be entertained only when there is persistence in the sin of light-hearted divorce and repeated remarriage." (*Ibid.*, 1932, I, p. 112, quoting report on "South African Report on the Divorce Problem," in *The Banner,* Sept. 24, 1922).

The advice of the churches of the Netherlands and South Africa was reported as received by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924. The advice was clearly consistent with the position taken in the Van Lonkhuyzen-Sevensma-Danhof report of 1916, and wholly divergent from the official and historic stand of the Christian Reformed Church.

This advice does not seem to have been received with relish. What is more serious — after delaying action on the professed ground that wider spread should be given to the advices of the Netherlands and South Africa — action was taken that tended to keep these advices from the attention of the churches; and obviously one-sided committees were appointed for further study of the question — committees which tended to neutralize the advices given by the Netherlands and South Africa by confusing the issues. In consideration of the urgency of the matter before the Christian Reformed Church, and the hard and able work put into the advice by the churches of the Netherlands and South Africa, the manner in which these advices were dealt with makes it hard to look upon this period in the history of the Christian Reformed Church other than with a feeling of shame.

But let the record tell the story:

The Synod of 1924 decided not to choose a position in this important but difficult matter as yet:

(1) Because the reports of the Netherlands and South Africa have not yet by any means been sufficiently studied in our circles for us to come to a decision.

(2) Because also in the Netherlands the last word in this matter has not yet been spoken. (*Note*: This second ground was completely misleading. The Netherlands Study Committee had also taken up the question of the number of grounds allowed in Scripture for divorce. The Synod of Utrecht decided not to take position on *that* question, but to commend it to the further thought of her churches. *But,* on the question of the membership status of those sinfully divorced and remarried, the churches of the Netherlands had spoken the final word, and had adopted a clear and definitive position which they commended to the Christian Reformed Church.)

The Synod of 1924 decided instead to appoint a committee to study the reports of the Netherlands and South Africa, and the reports submitted to the

Christian Reformed Synod of 1916, and make report to the Synod of 1926. It was further decided that the reports of the churches of the Netherlands and South Africa should be printed in the *Acts of Synod,* "so that this material can be studied in broader circles." (*Acts* 1924, Art. 77. pp. 89, 90).

This professed concern for a fuller and presumably more objective study of the issue seems, however, to be belied by two subsequent actions taken by this same Synod. (Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 156, 157). The first is that at a later session the Synod *decided not to publish* the reports of the Netherlands and South Africa in the *Acts of Synod,* but to instruct the Stated Clerk to order a copy of the Netherlands Report for each member of the study committee (*i.e.,* three copies). The second action concerned the personnel of the new study committee. Three men were appointed — Prof. F. M. Ten Hoor, Dr. C. Volbeda, and the Rev. H. J. Kuiper. It is enough to say that both Prof. Ten Hoor and Dr. Volbeda were on one side of the issue in the previous study committee, and they were now appointed to evaluate their own report and the reports of those who differed from them. There was considerable complaint in the church about the biased constitution of the study committee. The committee itself made mention of the "public criticism expressed about the constitution of the Committee," and recommended that two members be added to remove all cause of suspicion. (*Agenda,* 1926, p. 183).

The church's unhappiness with the advice received from the churches of the Netherlands and South Africa becomes apparent from the fact that the Synod of 1924 did not even have the civility to express thanks for the advice given. The church did not express her thanks, in fact, until 1926, when Synod was overtured to do so by Classis Illinois. It is further an amazing circumstance that the *Synodical Acts* of the Christian Reformed Church have nowhere incorporated any kind of quotation of the advice given by the two sister-churches, nor even a bare statement concerning the nature of their advices. The only recognition given to their advice is the statement in the *Acts* of 1924 that "answer has now been received from both churches containing what was decided by them" (pp. 89, 90). It was not until 1930 that portions of the report of the Netherlands churches were included in the report of the study committee, published in the *Agenda,* and not until 1932 that the South African report appeared in the *Agenda* as a quotation from Dr. Beets' editorial in *The Banner* of Sept. 24, 1922. It is inexcusable that these thorough and scholarly studies should have been kept from the membership and ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.

The work that was done by the study committee appointed in 1924 did not alleviate suspicion concerning the biased constitution of that committee. That committee submitted a brief communication in 1926, informing Synod that it was not ready to report because it was thought necessary to wait for more complete action on the question by the churches of the Netherlands That is to say, it was judged that the church should wait until the churches of the Netherlands had decided on the question of the number of grounds allowed in Scripture for divorce. This, of course, had no bearing whatsoever on the question on which we sought advice and on which the Netherlands churches had given final and clear advice. If the recommendation of the committee had been accepted, it would have served the purpose of resisting change in the church's position and keeping the "historic stand" indefinitely. The Synod of 1926 declared, however, that since complete advice had been received on the point at issue, it was not necessary to wait for decision on the matter of grounds. The committee was instructed to continue its work, and, to raise its constitution above suspicion, two members were added to it — Dr. H. H. Meeter, and the Rev. Gerrit Hoeksema.

Dr. Meeter did not serve because he was too busy. The other four members of the committee reported in 1928. Their report was a masterpiece of confusion and procrastination. Once again the committee informed Synod that though it had met often it was not ready with its report. Reasons: (1) It was highly advisable to consider also the question of the number of grounds for divorce. (2) In considering the matter of grounds, the committee faced the question as to whether the Bible does not teach the absolute indissolubility of marriage, except only through death, and therefore does not allow any divorce with any right of remarriage. This, the committee thought, was obviously the prior question. (*Agenda,* 1928, p. 127).

The Synod of 1928 expressed disappointment that the committee was not yet finished with its work, and exhorted it to stick to the practical question which was the occasion for its being appointed. Meanwhile, the committee was reconstituted. Dr. S. Volbeda, Dr. H. H. Meeter, and the Rev. H. J. Kuiper were "excused" from membership on the committee. (Cf. *Agenda,* 1930, I, p. 78). The committee now consisted of: Prof. F. M. Ten Hoor, the Revs. G. Hoeksema, W. P. Van Wyk, D. H. Kromminga, and H. Keegstra.

A New Mind Versus An Old Tradition

After the reconstitution of the study committee on divorce in 1928, a new mind came to expression in the official documents of the church. It was a mind that favored change in the church's position, in keeping with the advice given by the churches of the Netherlands and South Africa. But this "new mind" met up with the stubborn resistance of an "old tradition," and therefore failed to effect a change in the church's position on divorce and remarriage. In three successive Synods — 1930, 1932, 1934 — a committee made up of some of the most able and trusted men in the church recommended a change in the church's position. But each time the church chose to maintain the *status quo*, and in the last instance, the Synod of 1934, she seemed clearly and decisively to reject the recommendation that agreed with the advice of the churches of the Netherlands and South Africa.

In 1930 the newly constituted committee presented to Synod the unanimous recommendation that the church declare parties divorced and remarried may be received into the membership of the church upon sufficient evidence of sincere repentance. It is of particular interest to note that Prof. F. M. Ten Hoor, who since 1914 had been associated with the "old tradition," here and hereafter took position with the "new mind." The Rev. Gerrit Hoeksema functioned continuously as the Secretary of this committee.

It was the weakness of this committee's study that it subscribed to the wholly unproved but governing theory that marriage is *in fact* never dissolved except by adultery. The committee therefore resorted to a casuistical attempt to prove that the marriage of those divorced and remarried on unbiblical grounds was after all and really broken by adultery. The committee advised Synod as follows:

> (1) Remarriage, after unbiblical divorce, is an act of adultery. This gives the right to the other party to consider the first marriage to be broken, and to remarry also, without loss of any of the rights and privileges of church membership.
>
> (2) The Church must regard a marriage, dissolved by the State on non-biblical grounds, as legally dissolved also before God and His Church, as soon as adultery, the Biblical ground for divorce, is present through the contracting of a second marriage by any one of the divorced parties.
>
> (3) Therefore, parties divorced and remarried can be given the full rights and privileges of membership on condition that there be sufficient evidence of sincere repentance, and that the sins of unbiblical divorce and remarriage be confessed by both. (*Agenda*, 1930, Part I, pp. 89, 90).

Here was reasoning that made of remarriage after unbiblical divorce a happy circumstance which, like death or murder, effectively dissolved the first marriage. Though it was also a sin that had to be repented of, it had the virtue of being the kind of sin that simplified otherwise confused relationships, and relieved people of the impossible burden of living in a marriage of continuous adultery. The committee got encouragement for this kind of reasoning from an observation made by the committee of the Netherlands (though not basic to their advice) that "the act of adultery committed by the contracting of a second marriage, post-validates the divorce decreed by the magistrate." (*Ibid.*, p. 82, quoting *Rapporten*, Synode van Utrecht, p. 31). It is unfortunate that the committee did not follow the simpler and truer logic of the Scriptural position proposed years before by Dr. John Van Lonkhuyzen, that even in the event of unbiblical divorce marriage is *in fact dissolved* by the divorce decree of the State.

Oddly enough, however, the Advisory Committee to the Synod of 1930 did propose the adoption of this reasoning, but not the new position that seemed to follow from it. The Advisory Committee proposed that Synod adopt the conclusions of "points one and two." But on "point three," the conclusion drawn from "points one and two," the ten-member Advisory Committee was divided by a vote of five to five. This was a striking evidence of the stubborn resistance of the "old tradition" to the "new mind." The matter was therefore simply placed before Synod, and Synod, after extended discussion, decided to refer the matter back to its committee on divorce for further study, this committee to be enlarged by the addition of two members, Prof. L. Berkhof and Prof. H. Schultze, and to report to Synod of 1932. (*Acts* 1930, Art. 57 (IV), pp. 54, 55).

This committee reported in 1932, and followed the very same line of reasoning as did the committee reporting in 1930. And now, with Prof. Ten Hoor again agreeing, and with the added weight of the agreement of Prof L. Berkhof and Prof. H. Schultze, the committee advised Synod "to adopt the following as the official stand of our Church":

> "Persons divorced on non-Biblical grounds and remarried, can enjoy the full rights and privileges of membership in the Church of Christ, if they sincerely repent of and confess their sins. The sin of un-Biblical divorce must be confessed by the guilty party or parties. The first party that remarries must confess his (her) adulterous act of contracting a second marriage." (*Agenda*, 1932, Part I, p. 125).

Several communications to the Synod of 1932 objected to this advice. One from the Consistory of Ripon, California, which maintained that parties unbiblically divorced were still joined together, added this characteristic observation: "That we may possibly exclude some from the church concerning whom we believe that God had accepted them is undoubtedly true. The Church can, however, not afford to put down her bars and let this evil in. If we do, we shall in a few years stand where the other churches in our land are at present. Let us

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be warned." (*Agenda*, 1932, II, p. xxix). This reflects the spirit of the church through the years. The church was afraid, and the old position was "safer."

The Advisory Committee to the Synod of 1932 advised against adoption of the study committee recommendation for the following reasons: (1) It proposed a radical departure from the "prevailing practice as it has obtained in our churches till now." The majority of our people are not ready for this new position, and "adoption of the rule at this stage would make for unrest and dissatisfaction." (2) The exegetical basis for the position proposed is too limited. (3) There has not been enough study of the question concerning the church's relation to the State's validation of divorce and remarriage. (4) The study committee errs in contending that adultery breaks the marriage tie for both. The adulterer, though no longer *legally bound* to the wife who divorced him is still *morally bound* to her. (*Acts* 1932, Art. 159, pp. 150-152).

In hopes of making some advance, after eighteen years of study, the Advisory Committee proposed this position:

> "If one of the parties to an un-biblical divorce be found innocent as to the divorce proceedings, and the other party be remarried, he (she) shall be regarded as free from his (her) former mate, and be permitted to remarry without forfeiting the right to membership in our churches by reason of such remarriage." (*Ibid.*, p. 153).

Synod was not impressed with this "Half-Way Covenant," however, and tabled it. Synod adopted only the further advice of the Advisory Committee that the study committee be continued, that it be instructed to provide fuller exegetical study, consider more closely to what extent the church should attribute validity to unbiblical divorces granted by the State, and report to the Synod of 1934. The Advisory Committee noted that the "valuable report" of the churches of the Netherlands "has never been made available to our people," and proposed that those parts bearing on the question submitted in 1916 be embodied in the report to the Synod of 1934. Dr. C. Bouma was added to the study committee. (*Ibid.*, pp. 153, 154).

In 1934 the study committee submitted the very same recommendation to Synod that had been presented in 1932. Its reasoning was the same: remarriage after unbiblical divorce is an act of adultery which severs the original tie for both parties. Therefore, if there is due repentance and confession of sins, they may be admitted to membership in the Church of Christ. There was no special study made of the question of the Church's relation to the decrees of the State, which, on the basis of the reasoning followed by the committee, was not altogether necessary. This report and recommendation was submitted by Prof. L. Berkhof, the Revs. W. P. Van Wyk, H. Keegstra, Prof. D. H. Kromminga, Prof. H. Schultze, and the Rev. G. Hoeksema. Prof. Ten Hoor had resigned because of ill health. (*Agenda*, 1934, II, pp. 229-252).

A Minority Report was submitted on the matter by Dr. C. Bouma. Dr. Bouma took exception to the basic argument of the study committee that the adultery of remarriage is ground for the complete cancellation of the previous marital tie and its obligations. He took issue with the considerations on which this argument was based and the conclusions drawn from it. He maintained that the party guilty of adultery does not have rights of remarriage equal to the innocent party. He recommended, therefore, that Synod reaffirm the principle of the position of 1890-1908 and further declare that "a person divorced on non-biblical ground and remarried during the lifetime of the other marriage partner cannot enjoy the privileges of membership in the Christian Reformed Church so long as the present marriage union continues or the original partner continues to live." This rule was not to apply, however, to the following parties:

> (1) To those who, in unbiblical divorce, were guiltless in the matter, and whose remarriage did not take place before the remarriage of the other.
>
> (2) To those who obtained divorce and remarried when their moral consciousness was such that they were not aware of the evils involved in divorce and remarriage as the church views it.
>
> (3) To those who committed these sins when members of a sister-denomination which follows a different procedure (e.g., Gereformeerde Kerken of the Netherlands) and whose case was adjudicated before they transferred to one of our churches. (*Agenda*, 1934, II, pp. 259-305).

The Advisory Committee to the Synod of 1934 proposed a series of propositions quite in line with the position and recommendation of the Majority study committee. One minority member of the Advisory Committee could not agree altogether, however. He wished for more light, and proposed that Synod continue the study committee. It was ruled that since the recommendations of the Advisory Committee "differed considerably from those of the committee appointed by the previous Synod" (which they did only in formal structure, but not in substance), the majority and minority study committee reports should be considered directly. After considerable discussion the majority recommendation — that those guilty of the sins of divorce and remarriage, can be admitted into the church on the condition of repentance and confession of sin — was *rejected by a vote of* 43 *to* 25. The Minority recommendation of Dr. Bouma was then taken up for consideration, and *tabled*. Thereupon the following motion was adopted:

"Synod decides to appoint a committee to consider the practical application of the principle adopted by the Synod of 1890 and reaffirmed by the Synod of 1908, this Committee also to consider the minority report and both the reports of the Pre-advisory Committee of this Synod, and to present its conclusions to the Synod of 1936." (*Acts* 1934, Art. 150, pp. 140-146).

The following facts stand out clearly in these actions of the Synod of 1934:

1. The proposal to change the church's position on divorce was rejected by a vote of 43 to 25. The "new mind" failed in three attempts to overcome the resistance of the "old tradition," and in the last instance the "new mind" seemed to have been officially repudiated.

2. The church looked upon the position of 1890-1908 — refusing membership to *guilty parties* in divorce and remarriage — as the governing position, and it was virtually reaffirmed as such by the decisions of the Synod of 1934.

3. The Synod of 1934 contemplated no reconsideration of the governing position of 1890-1908. This is evident from the following: (a) The majority report, which proposed change of position agreeable to the advice of the Netherlands and South Africa, was rejected. (b) The new study committee, though expected to consider the minority report of Dr. Bouma, was not enjoined to give consideration to the majority study committee report. (c) The mandate given to the new study committee was simply and clearly "to consider the practical application of the principles adopted by the Synod of 1890 and reaffirmed by the Synod of 1908."

4. Notwithstanding the clear choice of the Synod of 1934 for the "old tradition," the "new mind" was still strong and represented a considerable and important segment in the church — six of the seven members of the study committee, and six of the seven members of the Advisory Committee.

The Historic Stand *Retained* But Not *Maintained*

In view of the position taken by the Synod of 1934, the study committee on divorce was again reconstituted, and to it were now appointed: the Revs. Z. Sherda, W. Hendriksen, G. Hoeksema, Dr. C. Bouma, and Prof. D. H. Kromminga. Before the committee met, Prof. Kromminga withdrew, because he felt he could not serve after the 1934 Synod had taken the stand which it did — that of rejecting the position which Prof. Kromminga had in three different Synods recommended.

The new committee submitted two divergent reports — the "Bouma-Hendriksen Report," (*Agenda* 1936, Part I, pp. 46-96), and the "Hoeksema-Sherda Report" (*ibid.*, Part II, pp. 341-397). Both are very long, enter upon extensive discussion of the merits and demerits of the church's position, but neither of them add anything essentially new to previously stated arguments in the question. The "Bouma-Hendriksen Report" argued the position of the 1890-1908 stand, and made proposals concerning its application to the membership status of those divorced on unbiblical grounds and then remarried. The "Hoeksema-Sherda Report" proposed complete abandonment of the 1890-1908 position, and the substitution for it of another declaration.

The *Bouma-Hendriksen recommendations,* bearing only on those who have obtained unbiblical divorce and then remarried, are the following:

(1) In case the parties in question were members (by baptism or profession) of the Christian Reformed Church, and therefore under Christian Reformed discipline when they committed such sins:

(a) The *person first to remarry* cannot be a member of the church while the original spouse is living or the second marriage continues.

(b) The *second to remarry* can be a member, if innocent in the divorce proceedings, and if he did everything possible to contest the divorce.

(2) In the case of those who were not members (by baptism or profession) of the Christian Reformed Church at the time of divorce and remarriage:

(a) The *first to remarry* can be admitted to the membership of the church upon confession of those sins, provided there is assurance that his moral standards, or those of the church of which he was a member, were lower than those held by the Christian Reformed Church for her own membership.

(b) The *second to remarry* can be admitted to the church upon proper confession of the sin of unbiblical divorce (remarriage not being considered a sin for this person).

The *Hoeksema-Sherda recommendations* were in direct contradiction to the 1890-1908 stand. They advised Synod to declare:

(1) That in Biblical divorce, the marriage is completely broken before God and His Church. The guilty party may remarry as well as the innocent party, and may be a member of the church if he confesses and repents of his sin of adultery.

(2) In unbiblical divorce and remarriage:

(a) The first party to remarry commits adultery. This breaks the original marriage tie. Therefore,

(b) The second party to remarry does not thereby commit sin. He needs only to repent of sinful divorce to be a member of the church.

(c) The first party to remarry may be a member of the church if he repents of both sins of unbiblical divorce and adulterous remarriage.

(3) These decisions are to supersede any previous decisions that may be in conflict with them.

On either position it appeared that it might become increasingly more difficult for a person to know when he had to repent of sin and for how many sins he had to repent.

In addition to these two reports, Synod received two overtures — one from the Rev. H. Moes, proposing a revised version of the Bouma-Hendriksen recommendation, and one from Mr. Peter L. Van Dyken, of Ripon, California, asking for a rescind-

ing of the 1890-1908 position. To confuse matters the more, the admissibility of the Hoeksema-Sherda report was called into question, because it did not conform to the mandate of the Synod of 1934 — which asked not for reconsideration of the church's position, but for consideration of the practical application of that position. Synod declared it admissible, over the vigorous protest of many delegates. The Advisory Committee added to the stew by presenting to Synod a number of propositions which made the impossible or fanciful attempt "to incorporate in them the recommendations of both Reports." (*Acts* 1936, pp. 20-23; 103-105).

A baffled Synod set itself to its baffling assignment. It first decided to consider the propositions of the Advisory Committee. But after a very extensive discussion, these were tabled. It was then proposed to consider the Reports and Overtures in turn. This, too, was tabled. Synod then decided to get out of its confusion by turning back the tables of time twenty-two (22) years, and appointed a special committee "for the purpose of formulating an answer to the two concrete cases that are historically before Synod (since the year 1914), this Committee to report tomorrow." (*Ibid.*, Art. 152, p. 106).

The committee reported the next day, and in one day's time Synod resolved in the concrete the same problem which she had not been able to resolve in the abstract over a period of twenty-two years. The Muskegon and Alpine Avenue cases were resurrected from the year 1914 (whether the parties involved in them were still living in 1936, I am unable to say).

(1) In 1914 Classis Muskegon "asked the judgment of Synod concerning a woman who was divorced from her husband on the grounds of 'extreme cruelty,' and who later, after her first husband had remarried, herself remarried — whether she can be admitted as a member of the Church." (*Acts* 1914, Art. 51, p. 38).

The Synod of 1936 decided as follows:

"It is the opinion of Synod that if this woman shows clear signs of true repentance for her part in the divorce she can be admitted to membership in our Church.

"Ground. Through the adultery of her husband by his marrying another she became free from her first husband." (*Acts* 1936, Art. 186, p. 144).

(2) In 1914 the Alpine Avenue case also came before Synod. "A certain party, while in the state of unbelief and godlessness, was divorced by his wife, without resistance on his part, upon the grounds of cruelty and non-support. He remarried with another woman (who had also been divorced), was subsequently converted and declared and manifested sincere repentance as to his sins pertaining to this divorce and his adulterous remarriage." Classis Grand Rapids West would not approve the admission of this person. Alpine Avenue appealed the case to the Synod of 1914.

After 22 years of study of the general question, the Synod of 1936 took up the concrete case and declared:

"If to the satisfaction of the Consistory this person confesses his sins of unbiblical divorce and adulterous remarriage, and manifests true godliness in his life, he may be admitted to membership in our Church." (*Ibid.*, pp. 144, 145).

Decision That Pleases All and Serves None

It is possible that at the conclusion of these fantastic proceedings, both sides could have claimed "victory," and that it might be said that the Synod of 1936 had achieved that rare ecclesiastical phenomenon devoutly to be desired — a decision on a crucial issue that pleases all parties.

1. Those who took the Bouma-Hendriksen position could claim:

a. That the 1890-1908 position was still retained. Synod did not act on — in fact, did not even address itself to — the overture of Mr. Peter L. Van Dyken, requesting the rescinding of the 1890-1908 position. Nor did Synod adopt the Hoeksema-Sherda recommendations which would have superseded the traditional stand.

b. The decisions on the concrete cases of Muskegon and Alpine Avenue might have been considered "exceptions" to the stand of 1890-1908 — exceptions for those who committed the sins of divorce and remarriage while their moral sense was not up to Christian Reformed standards, while in the so-called "unenlightened state." This exception had been proposed by Dr. Bouma in 1934, and was again proposed by the Bouma-Hendriksen report of 1936.

2. On the other hand, those who took the Hoeksema-Sherda position could claim that the 1890-1908 "stand," and the reasoning on which it was based, was virtually abandoned. For there were "grounds" given for the decision in these two concrete cases, and these grounds were in direct contradiction to the reasoning and stand of 1890-1908. Note:

a. Synod declared in connection with the Muskegon case that a remarriage after unbiblical divorce is an act of adultery which breaks the first marriage — a position which committees had been proposing ever since 1930.

b. Synod thereby abandoned the 1890-1908 position that the guilty party in divorce still remains "bound" to the original marriage partner, and with it abandoned the prevailing inference that such a second marriage was a living in continual adultery.

c. Synod in both instances set down no other requirement for entrance into the church than the requirement that there should be confession and repentance.

The fact is that the church, in trying to please all men, had offended truth, consistency, and the honor of the church. For in 1936 the Christian Reformed Church gave equal standing to two mutually exclusive things — the traditional position of 1890-1908, and the decisions of 1936 that were in direct contradiction of that unrescinded position. The price for this was to be only more confusion in the years to come, and continuing conflict on the divorce question. The whole church was to suffer from this condition. Her witness was to be uncertain, her ministry to sinful people and their broken lives a pitifully weak one. But those who were to suffer most were those people who had fallen into sins from which God in grace spared others, and who after returning to God and confessing their sins could hear no voice from the Church of Jesus Christ except the voice of abstract theological debate and the judgment that they must consider themselves living in continuous adultery, and therefore outside of the Church, until the Christian Reformed Church should have made up her mind whether the position she officially held was right or wrong.

Whatever else may be said about the decisions of 1936, one could learn these lessons from it: (1) That resolution of moral problems comes more easily and truly if they are faced in concrete and living substance than if they are laboriously studied only in the abstract. (2) That judgment as to how people in the church are to be dealt with after they have sinned and repented can better be made by local consistories which know the people than by a Synod to whom these people are only abstractions encased in certain moral propositions. (3) That for people who are oppressed by the frustrations of Synodical "stands," there is some relief in knowing that in the Christian Reformed Church it is possible, and apparently permissible, to make decisions in concrete individual cases which do not conform to the abstract "stand" or "position" maintained by Synod.

II. The "Historic Stand" in a Situation of Contradiction and Confusion (1936-1946).

The Historic Stand Resumes Command

The decision of the Synod of 1936 terminated Synodical action on the divorce question for a period of eight years. It appeared that in these years, even though the traditional stand still stood, each church was at liberty to do as she "might answer to God and her own conscience." But in the year 1944 Synod assumed governance of divorce questions again, and newly declared that the position of 1890-1908 was still the governing position of the Christian Reformed Church on matters of divorce and remarriage.

In 1944 the so-called "Cicero Divorce Case" came to Synod and to the attention of the whole church.

A man and woman who had been unfaithful in their respective marriages had each obtained divorce on unbiblical grounds. They subsequently were married to each other. In time their first marriage partners remarried also.

The man and woman, designated Mr. and Mrs. A., came to services at the First Cicero Church. After some time they confessed their sins of adultery and adulterous remarriage, and professed their faith before the Consistory. They were received into the membership of the church. The First Cicero Consistory took the position that their original marriage ties did not any longer exist (because their original mates had remarried), and that therefore they were not living in an adulterous relationship. Upon confession of their sins they could, therefore, be received into the church. This was consistent with the position taken by the Synod of 1936 in the Muskegon and Alpine Avenue cases.

Four members of the Cicero Church registered protest against the Consistory, declaring that Mr. and Mrs. A. were enjoying the fruits of their sins and were living in an illicit relationship. They adduced as grounds the decisions of 1890 and 1908, which declared guilty parties in divorce as still bound to the original mate. After Classis Chicago North upheld the decision of the First Cicero Consistory, these four members made appeal to Synod.

The Synod of 1944 declared "that in this concrete case the parties guilty of divorce and remarriage may not be admitted as members of one of our churches." The grounds were: (1) "The decisions of the Synods of 1890 and 1908 still constitute the official position of our church, and therefore should be upheld in this concrete case, since said decisions have never been rescinded." (2) The decisions of 1936, cited by the Cicero Church, do not constitute a ground, since the Muskegon and Alpine Avenue cases were not analagous to the Cicero case.

In giving the last ground, Synod was quite mistaken. It is true that the Cicero case was not exactly like the Muskegon and Alpine Avenue cases — no two cases ever being wholly alike. But if the Synod of 1936 could allow membership to those who sinned in divorce and remarriage on condition of confession and repentance — on the ground that remarriage is an act of adultery which dissolves the first marriage — there is no reason why the same could not have been allowed in 1944.

The crucial matter is that there was still that 1890-1908 position on the books, unrescinded. And it so happened that it was the mind of Synod to apply it to the concrete case that came to hand.

The Synod of 1944 called down the 1890-1908 position in another instance. Classis Minnesota had a concrete case before it, and did not know

whether to apply the 1890-1908 stand or follow the precedent set by the decisions of 1936. The Synod of 1944 quoted the decisions of 1890 and 1908, and without attempting to reconcile their obvious contradiction with the decisions of 1936, declared: "The previous decisions of 1890 and 1908 were not altered, hence Classis Minnesota should judge its case in the light of the principles maintained in those decisions." (*Acts* 1944, Art. 125, pp. 87, 88).

The Historic Stand Suspended and Put to Re-examination

The Synod of 1945 had another mind, however, and decided to follow the principles expressed in the decisions of 1936. The First Church of Cicero made appeal against the decisions of the Synod of 1944 in the "Cicero Divorce Case." But meanwhile, the First Cicero Church also presented a strong overture asking first of all for the rescinding of the position of 1890-1908 as a wholly unscriptural position. Mr. Peter L. Van Dyken, of Ripon, California, also submitted a protest against the decision of 1944, and an overture asking for the rescinding of the position of 1890-1908. Still another overture was present from Classis Chicago North, asking that Synod once again appoint a committee to make a thorough study of the question of divorce and make an attempt to remove the conflict existing in the decisions of our Synods. (*Acts* 1945, Art. 76, pp. 67, 68).

In response to the overtures for rescinding 1890-1908, and to the overture asking for a study committee again to make a thorough study of the question of divorce, the Synod of 1945 decided to "appoint a committee to re-examine the decisions of 1890 and 1908, dealing with the church membership of unbiblically divorced and remarried persons who come to repentance of their sins." Grounds: (1) Synod has never adopted an official exegetical position in support of previous decisions. (2) The decisions of 1890 and 1908 are inflexible and allow of no exceptions. (3) The decisions of 1936 recognize that exceptions must be made; and a renewed endeavor should be put forth to remove the apparent inconsistency. (*Ibid.*, p. 69).

Later in the session the Synod of 1945 took note of the fact that the people involved in the Cicero Divorce Case committed their sins while "in a state of ignorance concerning the magnitude of their sin." Thereupon Synod declared: "In view of this history, the Synod advises Cicero I, that, in this particular case, these people may be admitted to membership in our church, if to the satisfaction of the consistory they confess their sins of unbiblical divorce and adulterous marriage and manifest true godliness in their life." (*Ibid.*, Art. 95, p. 93). This was, therefore, a reversal of the decision of 1944. And this marks the introduction into Christian Reformed canon law of the principle that the committing of a sin while in a state of spiritual ignorance allows people to be freed from suffering certain consequences of that sin — a sort of relief from penance.

Contradiction and Confusion "Ended Forthwith"

The Synod of 1946, however, reverted back to the "historical stand of 1890-1908." Several protests were registered with the Synod of 1946 against the decision taken in 1945 in the "Cicero Divorce Case." The major considerations in the protests were: (1) that the decision of 1945 was based on grounds contrary to fact, since the people involved in the case *were not* in a state of spiritual ignorance when they committed the sins of divorce and remarriage. (2) that the decision of 1945 was in contradiction to the historic stand of 1890-1908.

Synod seems quite readily to have adopted the advice of its Advisory Committee and decided "that the protestants be sustained and that the 1945 decision be reversed." Grounds: (1) "Synod must end forthwith the confusion created by letting both decisions, 1944 and 1945, stand side by side." (2) "The decision of 1945 is contrary to actual facts." (3) "The decision of 1945 was contrary to the historical stand of 1890 and 1908, and re-iterated by the decision of 1944." (*Acts* 1946, Art. 102, p. 73 Cf. Art. 84, pp. 47-50).

The decisions of 1936, it may be noted, certainly led a charmed life. Though "contrary to the historical stand of 1890 and 1908," they were left undisturbed. Though they obviously introduced confusion by standing next to decisions like those of 1944 and 1946 — with which they were in direct contradiction — the 1936 decisions were left untouched. It was getting to be more precarious to appeal to 1936 as a standard, however. For the historic stand of 1890-1908 was coming back into a completely governing position. And the Synod of 1947 was to make it, with one Roman Catholic exception, the only governing and allowable position in the Christian Reformed Church.

IV. The "Historic Stand" — Romanized, Rigorized, Apologized, And ? ? ? ?

The year 1947 introduces a new era in the history of the divorce problem in the Christian Reformed Church. In this period the traditional stand of 1890-1908 was given more complete, and more definitive statement, and was placed on what was considered the long-awaited Scriptural foundation. But in this same period the Scriptural adequacy of the 1890-1908 position, even in terms of the

Scriptural exegesis provided by the Synod of 1947, was not only generally but even officially held to be in grave doubt. Whether this is also the era in which the 1890-1908 position (refined by 1947), so long under such searching attack, will be completely abandoned, is something that perhaps the events of this year will show.

Unanimous Agreement To Differ

The study committee which was appointed in 1945 "to re-examine the decisions of 1890 and 1908" offered its report to the Synod of 1947. The members of this committee were: the Revs. J. Gritter, J. Weidenaar, G. Hoeksema, A. A. Hoekema, W. Brink, Dr. R. J. Danhof, Prof. William Hendriksen, and Prof. Ralph Stob.

The report of this committee was calculated not to alienate friends of any stripe, nor to influence people of any kind. The report belabored and gave extensive Scriptural evidence for the obvious, on which there was agreement not only in the committee but in the whole Christian Church. And at the crucial point, the very point at issue, the committee had nothing to say except that it was divided. None of the proponents of either one position or the other took the trouble to submit his own reasoned judgment. The committee submitted a unanimous report — but it was unanimous only in its will to argue the unquestioned and to confess that it differed on the point at issue.

Here is the substance of the report:

(1) Consistories and ministers should do all in their power to warn unceasingly against every violation of the marriage-bond. (The committee cites Scripture to prove this point).

(2) Persons who commit the sin of adultery or of unbiblical divorce and remarriage "sin grievously against the moral law," and if they are members of the church they "have thereby greatly added to their sin and have given great offense to and in the church of Christ." (The committee cites Scripture to prove this point, too).

(3) Persons who have sinned in the above manner should be given "a period of probation" so that the consistory can become convinced of their sorrow and desire to lead a new, godly life, and so that the congregation can "give silent approval to the consistorial action of admission or readmission." (NOTE: It is not here stated explicity that those who confess and repent should be readmitted, or if so on what further conditions. In view of what follows, it seems the purpose of this point, (3), to say: "IF these people are readmitted on one position or another, they should first be given a period of probation.")

(4) On the question "whether the sincerity of the repentance should also be manifested by the abrogation of the marriage or at least by abstinence from marital relations," there was division in the committee. Some thought this should not be required of those who sinned while in spiritual darkness. Some were not sure there was enough Scriptural evidence for this position. Some thought it should be required of those who were members of the church when they sinned. Some thought not.

(5) The "regulations" in (1), (2), (3), above, were proposed as substitute for the decisions of 1890 and 1908. Grounds: 1890-1908 do not incorporate satisfactory Scriptural evidence; and "Scripture promises forgiveness and restoration to all who manifest genuine repentance." (*Acts* 1947, pp. 238-245).

Shades of Rome!

It should be noted that in proposing that points 1, 2, 3, be substituted for 1890-1908, the committee was asking that perfectly obvious truths, having no bearing on the "problem," and that, on the problem itself, nothing but a big "IF," should be adopted as the official position of the church. It is hard to conceive of a report that so little commended itself to acceptance.

The whole matter was put into the hands of an Advisory Committee at the Synod of 1947. One of the members of the study committee, Prof. W. Hendriksen, was Advisor to the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee came back to Synod with a position of its own construction, careful to build it with some reference to the report of the study committee. The report of the Advisory Committee underscored the obvious, and then proceeded to give clear statement of a definitive position on the very point at issue — the point on which the study committee was divided and said nothing. On this point at issue — *i.e.*, the conditions on which those who had sinned in divorce and remarriage could be members of the church — the Advisory Committee proposed the following:

(1) Those who sinned by adultery and remarriage, or by unbiblical divorce and remarriage, can be admitted into the membership of the church only if they show the sincerity of their repentance by returning to the former marriage partner, or at least by ceasing to live with the second marriage partner.

Grounds: The contention, based on Rom. 7:1-3, and I Cor. 7:39, that a second marriage after adultery, or after unbiblical divorce, is one of continuous adultery, because the original marriage bond remains in force; and sincere repentance means forsaking the sin repented of.

(2) If those who sinned thus sinned while they were in ignorance of the Word of God on these matters, they will *not* have to show repentance by "abrogation of the marriage bond or cessation of marital relations."

Grounds: The teaching of Scripture that "the same treatment" is not accorded "to those who have sinned without the law as to those who have sinned under the law," (*Acts* 1947, pp. 66, 67).

This was 1890-1908 all over again, but more fully and more definitively stated, and with its rigor relieved by the granting of one exception — the exception for those who had sinned while in spiritual ignorance — a Roman Catholic sort of indulgence, freeing from penance. This was the exception proposed already in 1934 by Dr. C. Bouma, and by the Bouma-Hendriksen report of 1936. Now, by the adoption of this position by the Synod of 1947, it

became part of the official position of the Christian Reformed Church.

Indulgence Cancelled! Return to Rigor

But the challenge to this position came quickly. A protest against it was registered with the Synod of 1948 by Mr. Peter L. Van Dyken. Mr. Van Dyken had registered objections to the position of 1890-1908, and asked for its rescinding, at the Synods of 1936, 1945, and 1946. A layman, he has addressed himself to the problem of divorce with competence and exceptional discernment of the issues at the heart of the problem. His protest in 1948 against the decisions of 1947 was a solid challenge to the Scripturalness of the 1947 position. Mr. Van Dyken protested the position of 1947 as "both wrong in principle and impossible of execution." He objected that the requirement to return to the original marriage partner or cease living in the second marriage is: (1) "contrary to the rule and authority of God as duly manifested" in the Civil Government, and (2) "as much against the revealed will of God in Scripture as it is against the civil law." The principle of providing relief from punishment for those who sinned in ignorance he designated as wholly contrary to the teaching of Scripture. (*Acts* 1948, Art. 125, p. 83).

The Synod of 1948 appointed a study committee to study Mr. Van Dyken's protest. The committee (the Revs. J. Daane, G. Hoeksema, P. Holwerda, J. Weidenaar, W. Brink) reported in 1951. Since the report had not been in publication for a long enough period of time, it was decided to postpone consideration of it until the meeting of the Synod of 1952. The committee was divided into a Majority and Minority. The Majority recommended that Synod sustain the protest of Mr. Van Dyken, and that Synod rescind the requirements of the 1947 position as being contrary to the Word of God, and as proposing a double standard of morality. The Minority, the Rev. William P. Brink, was agreeable to parts of Mr. Van Dyken's protest. He felt, however, that Mr. Van Dyken accorded too much authority to the decrees of the State in matters of divorce and marriage, and was also of the opinion that Mr. Van Dyken had not disproved the thesis of "continual adultery." At the same time the Rev. Brink deplored the fact that stronger proof had not been provided by the Synod of 1947 for that thesis.

Rev. Brink therefore proposed:

(1) That Synod no longer require that a person divorced and remarried "return to a former marriage partner" in order to show sincere repentance.

(2) That the exception for those who committed the sins of divorce and remarriage while in spiritual darkness be no longer allowed.

(3) That a study committee be appointed to "examine the exegetical foundation for the thesis that a second marriage after unbiblical divorce is a continuous living in adultery." If there is conclusive substantiation for this position, the committee is to advise concerning the problem of "possible ethical involvements . . . which may demand that an unbiblically divorced and remarried person shall continue in the second marriage." If there is no conclusive substantiation for the "thesis of continuous adultery, the Committee is to propose a new position on divorce and remarriage." (*Acts* 1951, pp. 410-418; *Acts* 1952, 144-152).

The Synod of 1952 adopted the recommendations presented by the Minority, the Rev. William Brink. (*Acts* 1952, Art. 78, pp. 21, 22; Art. 84, pp. 22, 23)

The position of the Christian Reformed Church now is that any person guilty of the sins of divorce and remarriage cannot be a member of the church unless he shows repentance by ceasing to live in the second marriage relationship. This position is based on the old judgment that for those guilty in the matter of divorce, the first marriage relationship is still binding, so that a remarriage is a living in continuous adultery.

Strong Position, Weak Conviction

There is one notable thing about the decision of 1952. For the very first time in the history of the Christian Reformed Church, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church has officially confessed that her position is based not on the demands of Scripture but on the choice and will of the church. It is, therefore, after the fashion of Rome, an institutional position, resting upon the authority of the church's pronouncement, but not a divine demand resting upon the authority of the Word of God.

At the Synod of 1952, when the proposal to appoint a committee "to examine the exegetical foundation for the thesis" of continuous adultery was being discussed, one of the delegates asked somewhat plaintively and in the spirit of alarm: "But shouldn't we search out the Scriptural evidence *before* we adopt a position?" There was no answer to that except the remark made by another delegate, who said: "I don't think we will ever be able to prove the thesis of continuous adultery from Scripture. I think, that we should continue to maintain our position for practical reasons." This is what the church has been doing for many years past — maintaining her rigorous divorce position because she was afraid that in relinquishing it she would "let the bars down" and "throw the church open to all kinds of divorce evils." There are many, however, who think that it is best to be guided by the Word of God, which is governing for the life of the Church as well as a blessing to sinners, and who are sure that if we simply follow God's Word, God

can be trusted to keep His Church free from the evils that would ruin her life and witness.

Meanwhile, the committee appointed in 1952 (the Rev. William Kok, Dr. John Kromminga, the Revs. H. Erffmeyer, B. J. Haan, J. Vander Ploeg, and Frederick W. Van Houten) has reported. Their report came to the Synod of 1954. (*Acts* 1954, pp. 218-232). Concerning this report it may be said:

1. That the committee professes to have found adequate support for the thesis of continual adultery. The committee's evidence is, on its own confession, rather weak. Note that:

   a. The committee acknowledges that no direct evidence can be found in Scripture for the thesis. It therefore proposes to establish the thesis in question by "cumulative and inferential argumentation."

   b. While confessing the weakness of its evidence, the committee declares: "the burden of proof rests on those who would contest this position."

2. The committee proposes that the old traditional position be maintained with all of its rigor, and without any kind of qualification or exception. "There are no ethical involvements of sufficient weight to warrant a perpetuation of the sin of living in a marriage which is illegitimate in its very nature. Separation remains the solution. Where separation is considered impossible by the parties involved, it is impossible also to grant the full privileges of church membership."

3. In connection with the question of ethical involvements, the committee proposes that a new declaration be added to the position on divorce. If people feel they cannot separate, it is proposed that "as much spiritual care as possible ought to be offered to those who show some signs of repentance and who seek the ministrations of the Church of Christ." This is not only meaningless, but improper. The fact is that Scripture requires that "as much spiritual care as possible ought to be offered" even to those who do not show signs of repentance or seek the ministrations of the Church of Christ — *e.g.*, the Church's own wayward ones, or those who must be approached by the missionary calling of the Church. And it could even be said that the Scripture requires that "as much spiritual care as possible ought to be offered" to those who have no need of repentance.

When the report was presented to the Synod of 1954, that Synod decided that the committee should be continued and re-examine its report in the light of the report on Marital Problems of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1953, and in the light of discussions with a new committee appointed by the Synod of 1954 to analyze the Ecumenical Synod's report on Marital Problems. The committee resubmitted its report in 1955, with only very minor changes. But since the committee on Marital Problems was not yet ready to report, consideration of both reports was referred to the Synod of 1956. (Members of the Committee on Marital Problems are: the Revs. P. Holwerda, G. Hoeksema, W. P. Brink, Dr. Henry Stob, and Elder John Ribbens.)

Postscript

It would appear that the day of final decision is near. And it would further appear, from the long and distressing history just surveyed, that the final decision ought not to be delayed any longer. The Christian Reformed Church, while looking into the problem, and while casting large and long looks of judgment in the direction of adulterers and divorced people, might very well also consider looking at herself — to see whether or not she has not often had more concern for herself and her cherished safety than for the need of sinning people and for the demands of the Word of God. Perhaps, in very deed, the largest ingredient of the divorce problem, and the most stubborn obstacle to a resolution of it is the church herself.

We have been continually at the point of impasse, not because there is not enough clear Scriptural data concerning our duty toward sinners in a sinfully constituted society, nor because we have been without the guidance and counsel of the clear judgments of respected and trusted sister-churches. We have been always at the point of impasse because the church has given too little attention to sinners who need the gospel and its healing power the most, and because the church, with overweening concern for herself, has been afraid to relinquish a rule which she has counted essential to the maintenance of her own purity. May God in His mercy help us now at last to move beyond the stage of fruitless debate about the formal ecclesiastical question concerning the membership status of those divorced and remarried. May God help us out of the morasses of abstract theological argument, and help us with the living Word and in the fellowship of the living Christ and His Spirit to look into the desperate problem of living sinners.

To be sure, we should long ago have been addressing ourselves more fruitfully to the real and living problems of marriage, divorce, and related social problems, and engaging in a ministry that would help to heal broken relationships, broken homes, and broken lives. On the grave social and spiritual problem of divorce and remarriage there ought not to be continuing division and conflict within the very household of the church. For as long as it continues, the church will be greatly hampered in her calling to heal the divisions and conflicts in people's relationships to each other and to Jesus Christ and His Church.

World Unbent?*

by Lester DeKoster

LIKE ONE of the characters in a little story by J. M. Barrie, modern Western man has taken to pinching himself on the sly just to make sure he is really "there." Barrie's sweet young thing, however, was set to it by reading a little of David Hume; Western man's doubts have been aggravated by reading popularizations of Sigmund Freud. The contrast is instructive.

Barrie's young lady dealt seriously — though she knew it not — with metaphysics; modern man is absorbed by a technique. The lady was concerned with a self and its responsibilities to a real world; modern man finds his "self" explained away, and the vital forces he discovers in its stead rooted in the unfathomable dark. The lady was a soul in want of a world; Western man is a mysterious force in want of world and soul together.

Cut adrift from reality by a metaphysics he has never understood, shriven of his soul by a psychology he cannot comprehend, Western man has left to him only his hatreds, loves, and fears — chaotic and undisciplined, focused now here, now there — and his will to live. And these are what he finds when his pinching fastens on the elusive mysteries of himself.

One of his fears these days is of Communism. He fears it because it threatens his way of life. It threatens, that is, the *pattern* by which he *evades* the challenge of each new day to face unevasively himself and his world. For modern man, like ancient man and medieval man and, indeed, all men — is incorrigibly metaphysical, that is, he is made a living soul deeply athirst for living communion with living reality. And the dawn of each new day — what Helen Keller once called the "miracle" of darkness-becoming-light which she longed most to see — is an ever-renewed challenge to man to face this metaphysical truth about himself. And it is one of the things about the pattern of his daily life which endears it to him that by routine he is enabled to escape the pressure of what Augustine called the restlessness for God. To this pattern Communism poses a threat; and Western man, instinctively knowing that *behind* the facade lies *chaos* or *reality,* is afraid.

But the fear goes deeper. Communism takes metaphysics seriously. Beneath the Communist ideology lies a theory of reality, and at the apex of Communist endeavor beckons a real goal fo human existence. Communism knows whence i comes and whither it goes. Thus it elicits from it followers a spirit of devotion and sacrifice tha frightens as it amazes us, and we pay it the respec of fear and hatred and obloquy that any metaphysi cal system become a religion arouses. Western ma senses by contrast how hollow his uncommitted lif is — and he is afraid.

Gradually the West is coming to see, therefore that the challenge of Communism is not only ma terial nor even spiritual alone, but stringentl metaphysical and religious. Gradually it is bein recognized that if Communism is to be met success fully, it must be met with a deeper grasp and true estimate of the nature of reality (which is meta physics) and of the goal and purpose of man (whic is religion); that is, a deeper and truer grasp o these things than our secularism dreams of, o Communism affords. Such deeper and truer gras of man and reality can be found only in authentic orthodox Christianity. That Western man has no seen this more clearly, and does not yet see it wel — though praise God his feet turn toward th church in ever greater numbers — is the measur of Christian ineffectiveness not only, but also o Christian implication in and commitment to Weste secularity.

One is prepared, therefore, heartily to hail book which, like Dr. J. V. Langmead Casserly' *The Bent World,* proposes a "Christian examina of East-West tensions." As great as is the reader' anticipation, however, so great his disappointment at the discovery that Dr. Casserly takes neithe Communism nor Christianity seriously. That h does better in his examination of the secularism b which the West cloaks from itself its spiritua nakedness is poor compensation for the absence o the metaphysical and religious footing which alon can give his criticisms validity. For secularism i a subtle thing, and feeds in part on philosophies ad mirable enough as far as they go, like humanism an liberalism which really draw their strength fro roots deep, though unacknowledged, in the Chris tian tradition. And secularism — as each of u knows from his own — runs deep and wears man pleasing aspects. To beard it in one guise is bu to encounter it again under another, until it is cu off at the root by a more profound grasp of man an world and God; that is, by *the* profound grasp o reality come to expression in a "Biblical and creeda

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* A review of *The Bent World,* by J. V. Langmead Casserly (Oxford University Press. 286 pp. $4.00). Dr. Casserly is Professor of Dogmatic Theology at General Theological Seminary, New York City.

hristianity," to which Dr. Casserly pays formal ut insubstantial service.

To review briefly *The Bent World*:

Dr. Casserly's conclusion that "Marx had little ptitude for metaphysics" is not only, as I have uggested above, grievously to misconstrue the hole thrust of Marxism, but it is to reduce the est of Dr. Casserly's criticism of it to the conven- onal and futile phrase-making that it is.

Marxism, whether we like it or not, is a sophisti- ated and massively going concern. It offers food o the hungry, escape to the oppressed, leisure to he weary, community to the lonely, and science and ulture to the spirit. In the limitless promise of the uture are dissolved all flaws of the present. And t is for this promise that men have died, and do ie, and that gladly.

To remind such men, as does Dr. Casserly, that Marx was a poor prophet, borrowed economic the- ry liberally from Smith and Ricardo, and over- implified the class structure is irrelevant if not mpertinent. To sketch neatly, as does Dr. Casser- y again, the unresolved contradictions Communism aces in Russia is, unrelated to the root error of Marx's false anthropology, as ineffectual as it is rite. "We do not know," Marx said, "what man nwarped by exploitation may become — he has ever been tried." Only *orthodox* Christianity can eply: man can only *become* what he really *is*, roken, shattered, fallen, lost.

Again, to define Marxist materialism as the be- ief that "the only truly human satisfactions are naterial satisfactions, and that, in consequence, naterial satisfactions are the only ones worth work- ng for," as does Dr. Casserly, is not only to render nexplicable Marx's own choice of grinding poverty n lieu of any number of lucrative careers, but also o make equally inexplicable the very real sacrifice which Communism evokes from countless of its ad- herents. What Dr. Casserly really is thus defining is only modern Western secularism.

To those of the West who supposed that our su- periority over Russia lay in secular achievement, Dr. Casserly may be more persuasive; for such dreams have latterly been rudely shaken by Rus- sian technological progress. Nor does it ease the shock to reflect that Russia has coalesced its tech- nological revolution into scarce a generation. If gadgets, motor cars, mass production, and physical comforts constitute the heart of "the American way of life," we can claim no superiority in tech- nique, and steadily less advantage in fact, over "the Communist way of life." To have reminded us of this is to have made some progress.

To tell us, as does Dr. Casserly, that instruments become masters if not governed by moral ends; to remind us that work is not virtuous in itself but only if directed to some useful end; to say that leisure is the fount of culture, and contemplation integral to worship: all this is salutary.

Dr. Casserly concludes his critique of Western secularism by strictures against its elevation of economics from an instrumental to a normative dis- cipline, its idolatry of nationalism as a misconceived patriotism, and its free and easy divorce which saps the vitality of the most basic of its social in- stitutions.

That such criticism, intrinsically valid though it may be, will be futile unless it drives Western man to an examination of the assumptions by which he lives, is, no doubt, why Dr. Casserly makes it in the name of Christianity. To lead Western man to other than the true God is but to make him the easier victim of Communism.

We may conclude, then, with some examina- tion of what Dr. Casserly means by Christianity.

What he calls "fundamentalism" is, he says, a "decadent and devitalized Protestant Christianity" which has refused to "heed the verdict of modern criticism, or to employ the tools of modern criticism in carrying out the theological task." What he calls "modernism," on the other hand, is a "theology so liberal and so subservient to the thought forms and the intellectual fashions of the present moment that it fails to be a genuine restatement of the original tradition . . . ."

This "genuine restatement" belongs to what he calls "critical orthodoxy." "We have to recover," he says, "the power to believe in a genuine Biblical and creedal Christianity . . . a fresh statement of an old message in new language and thought forms . . . ." What this "orthodox" language means to Dr. Casserly may be made clear by an illustra- tion.

Dr. Casserly is fond of the term "fallen." "Fallen man" and "fallen world" creep into and out of his argument like props on the Elizabethan stage. This is indeed Biblical language, of ancient lineage. But the secular mind would, sooner or later, rouse it- self to asking Dr. Casserly from whence man and world "fell." In accord with his "Biblical and creedal Christianity," one would suppose Dr. Cass- erly to begin his reply with the Genesis story. He does. His "fresh statement" of it is this: "The great Eden myth . . ." in which "we see man emerg- ing out of the darkness of primitive savagery . . . ." Man's condemnation to labor "must be accepted either as just punishment for, or as the fair and reasonable price of, civilized existence."

That this interpretation, which even as "myth" misses the heart of the Eden account of sin, ap- pears to Dr. Casserly as in any "orthodox" sense "Biblical and creedal," is a tribute to his ability, as R. H. Hutton wrote of Matthew Arnold, "to clothe

World Unbent? — Continued

a vacuum with impressive and majestic shadows till it looks something like a faith."

The suspicion thus aroused that Dr. Casserly does not reckon too seriously with what Archbishop Temple called "the hideous power of sin," is not lessened when we read that "history . . . is still the natural and proper nourishment of faith and hope," the hope that "when at last this bent world of ours is made straight . . . ."

If Dr. Casserly means by "fallen man" what Christianity has historically meant by the term, he has no ground for envisioning the bent world made straight this side of eternity — strive for it as we all must. No such optimism resides in his premise. If, none-the-less, he does anticipate a temporal millennium, he has a Marxist conclusion foisted on his "Christian" beginning; and he will find the Marxist eschatology, which defines sin and redemption both in temporal terms, more consistent and persuasive than his own. Dr. Casserly cannot have it two ways: a temporal utopia, even in prospect, rises from Marxist premises, but not from a "Biblical and creedal" Christianity.

Again, if the future of Dr. Casserly's new "orthodoxy" is assured, as he says, "if the world can see the critical intellects of free men developing it, articulating it freshly, bringing out of their treasury things new and old, displaying its prophetic vigor and force in a ruthless criticism of contemporary culture and the prevalent assumptions . . .", Dr. Casserly had best reckon beforehand with the likelihood that in "ruthless criticism of . . . prevalent assumptions" — including Dr. Casserly's — the Marxist will be as challenging, as brilliant, to say no more, and as persuasive as the "modern orthodoxy." And if the treasury into which the "modern theologian" must dip to meet this demonic attack is his own "critical intellect" or the mythologized Bible and creeds, his chances of an auspicious future are actuarially slim.

In this clash of titans only the God who speaks in a *genuine* Revelation is strong to save.

No doubt Dr. Casserly is correct in his estimate of the reluctance of much of "fundamentalism" to listen respectfully to "modern criticism," to take it seriously, and to meet it honestly. Often "fundamentalists" do comport themselves, for example, as if to take Darwin seriously were already to succumb to him; as if, indeed, unlike Ezra, having boasted of the might of the Lord, they were none-the-less afraid to venture on the open highway. This bad conscience accounts, no doubt, for the acerbity of much of their polemic and apologetic.

But if "fundamentalism" often crouches as if in an air-raid shelter, neither daring to go out nor very effective in persuading the heedless or the hardier to come in, hoping merely to survive until the enemy has gone away, then Dr. Casserly and those who think like him must not forget that this shelter also houses those precious documents which Dr. Casserly, too, has formally espoused as his own. And he seems to forget that it were just as foolhardy to venture forth to battle leaving his weapons behind as to crouch in the shelter afraid to move.

The theologians Protestantism requires for such a time are not those who, like Dr. Casserly, meet the modern world with ancient creeds "restated" to mean what they do not say, but rather "theologians" akin to such as Catholicism has found in its Maritain's and Gilson's, who can retain both ancient form and meaning and make them together relevant to modern problems and responsive to modern criticism.

THE Christian challenge to Marxism and secularism alike is this: that God, not dialectical materialism nor human prowess, is the author of salvation for a man desperately unable to save himself. This, also, Dr. Casserly says.

To mean this seriously, however, is to mean — as Dr. Casserly does *not* say — that an historical, real tomb stood historically empty on the first Easter morning, in fulfillment of an historical, genuine Revelation starting with "In the beginning . . . ." To sacrifice this conviction is not to heed "modern criticism," but to surrender to it.

It is in default of this unique declaration that Dr. Casserly's argument often assumes the form that because his membership is in the Christian church therefore his reasoning must be Christian. The implied assumption that the Christian interpretation of life does have a genre of its own is validated only if the Christianity on which Dr. Casserly bases his reasoning begins with the great signatures of his faith and remains true to them.

Thus, *e.g.*, that God entered history as a man to release the intolerable tensions of history by opening again the gates of eternity becomes a valid foundation for a Christian social philosophy and criticism, dynamically anti-Marxist and anti-secular, only if the God-man was historically real — in life, in death, and in resurrection. To believe this, however, is to reckon with the fact that this historically real Person on the very day of His resurrection began "at Moses and all the prophets . . ." to expound the meaning of His suffering. Now, Dr. Casserly may choose, if he wishes, to substitute the word "myth" for "Moses," but he should then face "fearlessly" the consequences. His criticism of Marxism and secularity in *The Bent World* would, then, be less ambiguous, but would forfeit authenticity and conviction altogether.

Only a Christianity true to its origin, its Scripture, its creeds, and its history can face Marxism with hope of success — not only, or even primarily, rhetorical success, but with the only message which rights" the "bent" enthusiasm that false gospel ngenders: "Come unto me . . . and find rest unto our souls." Only this Christian challenge and initation can hope to persuade secularism to depart ts lonely and hollow and distraught ways.

Fifteen years ago, T. S. Eliot wrote: "If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin." Two names have changed, but the choice is essentially the same today. That Western man should be brought to see it clearly is indispensable to his salvation. But the way in which Dr. Casserly goes about it in *The Bent World* suggests that he should first take the warning more seriously for himself.

College Teaching

by Lambert J. Flokstra

GOOD TEACHING is goal-directed. A teacher in a Christian college has as his educational objective the forming and maturing of responsible and intelligent personalities conscious of their rights and prerogatives, their duties and obligations as citizens of the kingdom of God. To attain this goal he makes use, in the Christian sense, of the best and the finest in the cultural heritage of the human race as embodied in the liberating arts.

But good teaching involves more than a goal and subject matter. It also embraces such factors as the personality of the teacher, the nature of the student, and the function of administration.

What are some of the qualities of a good college teacher? First and foremost is that of scholarship. A teacher must know his subject and know it well. It is not sufficient for a teacher to have majored in his subject in the university or to have amassed a number of rudimentary facts or a body of information in his field. He must have a penetrating insight into his subject, must at least in broad outlines know its upper ranges and inner depths. He must know it well enough that he continues to be a student of it, ever striving to become better informed and equipped.

To prevent narrow specialization he must also strive to know his field in its relationship to related fields and ultimately to the whole body of knowledge and culture. One of the dangers of specialization is that each teacher has a myopic view of his own field and is absorbed in his own problems with scant concern for the process of education in its wholeness. A teacher who says: "I teach history and can't be concerned too much with students' mistakes in diction, sentence structure, and paragraph organization; that is the work of the English department" betrays a provincialism out of keeping with his profession. Since every teacher should strive to develop in his students precision of thinking and since language (in this case English) is the vehicle for the expression of thought, every teacher who teaches a subject in which English is involved is to that extent responsible for the teaching of English.

However, it is not enough that a teacher know his field. He must also enjoy it and be enthusiastic about it. A teacher who does not like his subject simply cannot teach well. At best he is a plodder; at worst a hypocrite or pretender. There is nothing students dislike more in a teacher than insincerity and pretense. But a teacher who on the whole likes his subject (not necessarily every part; there *is* drudgery in teaching) will carry with him into the classroom an enthusiasm which is contagious. An enthusiastic teacher takes a teachable fact, idea or principle, holds it up before the class, illuminates it by looking at it with his class first from this angle and then from that perspective until it becomes concrete, alive and vibrant with meaning. He proceeds in this manner step by step in orderly progression and in the process not only develops an interest in the subject on the part of the students but also builds up in them habits of thinking and attention.

A good teacher is also one who is continuously appraising his work and that of his students. As he teaches from day to day he strives to follow the minds of his students to discover whether his teaching has produced the desired results. Though such daily rapport testing is important, it is not sufficient and should be followed by periodic tests and examinations. The purpose of such testing is to discover whether the teaching has been effective and if not, why not. In other words, testing should be diagnostic in the sense of detecting why teaching has failed as well as establishing the fact of teaching failure itself. Viewed in this manner, testing becomes an integral part of the teaching process. At this point the question arises as to which type of test is more effective as a teaching device, the

new type objective tests or the traditional essay type of question. Because the objective testing movement has made considerable headway in American colleges in recent years the question is a relevant one. Without going into a controversial discussion of the merits and demerits of the two types, I would on the whole give preference to the essay type of test on the college level. In higher education we are especially concerned with the development of the higher mental processes such as reasoning, evaluation, the forming of generalizations, and an understanding of principles. Since the writing of connected discourse calls for the organization of ideas and creative expression, the essay type, it seems to me, is more appropriate to achieve the ends we have in mind than the new type tests which in the main deal with isolated and atomistic bits of learning. Because much also depends on the nature of the subject matter we teach, perhaps a judicious use of both types is desirable. The important principle to be observed is that the tests be diagnostic in character.

ANOTHER mark of a good teacher is that he knows his students. This means, to begin with, that the teacher understands human nature. Such an understanding of human nature in its loves and hates, its pleasures and pains, its idealism and petty antagonisms and jealousies, has always been the goal of a liberal education. Though some knowledge can be acquired through a study of theories of psychology, human development, and learning, a better revelation of human nature is embodied in the humanities and classics which deal with the perennial, the unchanging constants of humanity. Of all the classics, the greatest is the Bible for in it we have not only a picture of man but a divine portrayal of the true nature of humanity.

In addition, a teacher must understand the nature of youth; he must acquire a sympathetic insight into the nature and needs of the college student. How can this be learned? Undoubtedly many hints and suggestions may be gleaned from a study of books on the psychology of later adolescents and the like. However, such study, though necessary, is frequently academic and detached from real life. A teacher learns to know youth chiefly through experience. A vivid memory of one's own youth, a recollection of one's own college days, will be helpful. But the best way to learn to know the students is to associate with them from day to day both in and outside the classroom. In the classroom the teacher should, as soon as possible, learn to know their names and faces. Such recognition has a salutary effect. Outside the classroom, teachers do well to chat with individual students even though the topics of conversation appear to be trivial, and to mix with them in their clubs and outings. Through such informal associations, an alert teacher catches many a glimpse of what goes on in the inner life of the student. It is well-known that athletic directors and coaches frequently learn to know the students better than do the teachers of academic subjects.

An intimate knowledge of the student will contribute to another essential teaching characteristic. A good teacher should like his students. By this I do not mean a sentimental affection for the students because they are agreeable and lovable. Granting that youth, especially college youth, have many admirable and attractive qualities, these can not form an adequate basis for a feeling of attachment. The dynamic force in developing a feeling of good will is the cardinal virtue of Christian love. Christian love towards students demands that though the teacher does not condone their wrongs he sincerely seeks their real good, recognizing that each of them is a person, a self in his own right created in the image of God. In a Christian college we have the added incentive that each student is a child of the covenant. Nothing less than a deep personal experience of God's love in Christ Jesus on the part of the teacher will generate and sustain such love and produce the qualities of kindness, patience and sympathy so much needed in teaching.

ANOTHER factor to be considered in good teaching is the student. What characterizes a student? According to Webster, a student is a person engaged in study; a learner; a scholar. This dictionary definition does not fit the average college student of today; neither for that matter the student of yesteryear. The fact is that the typical student is resistant to learning. He comes to us with mental inertia; he simply does not like to work. Concentrated effort on school tasks is painful to him. He dislikes his elders because of their fixed and closed minds and their consequent failure to understand youth. He feels that the teacher and the school are out of touch with the real world outside the school. He shares with the public at large a resistance to the very idea of learning. In the school itself the athletic and social extra-curricular activities are powerful forces competing with the pursuit of the life of the mind. On the other hand the student is curious, impressionable and plastic; he is sensitive to new ideas. He is also enthusiastic and idealistic. Much of the radicalism and rebellion on the campus is idealism directed into wrong channels.

Such in brief is a description of the average student. Our students will not flow into our classroom with an eagerness to learn what we have to offer; they will rather be thinking of the current crucial basketball games or of their date of the night before.

The challenge and excitement of teaching lies in clearing the decks of the obstacles that militate against learning and in making capital of the positive qualities in the student in the direction of learning.

THERE is, however, one more factor in good teaching that should be considered, namely, that of administration.

In contrast to the relatively simple administrative set-up in European universities, administration in most of our colleges and universities has assumed gigantic proportions. In some institutions of higher learning almost forty per cent of the total budget is earmarked for administration. This preoccupation with administrative functions is an American academic disease growing out of a confusion of means and ends. Administration should never become an end in itself; it must always be and remain a means to an end. Toward what end should administration be a means? The answer is obvious, it seems to me, namely, the end of good teaching. Every administrative decision can finally be defended to the extent that it contributes to effective teaching since teaching is the chief business of the school or college. From this it follows that all administrative machinery should be so designed as to promote good teaching. A complex top-heavy administrative system all too frequently interferes with this supreme purpose of the school; hence administration should be kept as simple as possible. Space does not permit me to go into a discussion of the duties and relationships of internal and external administration and their respective bearings on teaching. When Dr. Robert Maynard Hutchins was chancellor of the University of Chicago, he developed, in one of his annual reports to the Board of Trustees of that institution, the thesis that the faculty members were not employees of the Board but that, on the contrary, the Board worked for the faculty members by relieving them of many onerous tasks so that they could concentrate their efforts on the business of teaching and research. If this point of view of the relation of administration and the teaching staff is defensible, and I think it is, everything in the last analysis centers about teaching.

Practically, how does this work out? In the first place, it means that in administration the selection of teachers is all-important. It furthers means that once a teacher has established himself as a member of the faculty he must, as a responsible person, accepting the goal of education agreed upon by the school, have academic freedom — freedom of learning and teaching. It is the task of administration to safeguard such freedom and to resist the pressures and threats militating against it. Again, in the interest of good teaching, the administration should from time to time review the problem of teaching loads and teacher-student ratios. If at Calvin College effective teaching necessitates the issuance of a Calvin Report, the administration should, through reduced teaching loads and other devices, provide the faculty members selected to prepare such a report time and opportunity to engage in this project.

Such are but a few of the practical applications of the principle that administration is a means to attain the end of good teaching.

In summary, good teaching involves a goal or purpose, a subject matter, a teacher, a student and an administration. The proper interaction and cross-fertilization of these elements will lead to effective teaching.

I close with the words of William Lyon Phelps: "The excitement of teaching comes from the fact that one is teaching a subject one loves to individuals who are worth more than all the money in the world," to which I would add, toward the all-encompassing goal of making them responsible citizens of the kingdom of God.

Interpreting Old Testament History

by Carl Kromminga

THE LATE Professor B. Holwerda of The Netherlands has left us a brief work in which he has indicated that there is need for special consideration of the interpretation of Old Testament history. In his "De Heilshistorie in de prediking" (in: . . . *Begonnen hebbende van Mozes*. . . . Terneuzen, 1953), he discusses the interpretation of Old Testament history particularly with a view to its use in preaching. Good writers on Hermeneutics have not, of course, neglected to treat the interpretation of Bible history, but few, if any, have devoted special attention to the subject itself. The history of redemption and the progress of revelation are generally taken into account when the grammatical-historical interpretation, the theological interpretation and typology are discussed. Separate treatment of

historical material is rare. Some homileticians do give it rather extensive notice, but there are few works which analyze the problems of the interpretation of sacred history intensively.

Holwerda's writing on the subject of redemptive history in preaching reflects the controversy on that subject in which he was engaged in The Netherlands. One is moved to suspect, however, that issues other than those involved in the preaching of redemptive history made the discussion rather heated at times. In the writing under consideration Holwerda does preserve a fraternal spirit, however. Holwerda wrote in opposition to the exemplary method of preaching on Old Testament history. He opposed the alleged practice of drawing direct parallels between the lives of the Old Testament believers and the lives of the New Testament Christians. In the writing under consideration he charges that the historical bond between, for instance, Abraham and David on the one hand, and the Christian on the other has been broken. Preachers do not get to the present-day believer by way of Jesus Christ. The movement tends to be direct from Abraham's experience to our religious life. The individual incident is explained in its psychological significance for us and the historical unity with us is broken (p. 89). Instead of setting forth what God was doing in Abraham in the progressively unfolding work of Christ, the preacher tends to speak of the significance of God in Christ for Abraham. One establishes the *ordo salutis* rather than the *historia salutis* (pp. 89, 90).

IN ORDER to be brief we pass on to the antitheses which Holwerda formulates in order to clarify the issue. He asks whether the history of redemption will be allowed to maintain its function as establishing dogma or will be used merely to illustrate doctrinal truths. Does one treat this historical material in its organic relationship to the rest of Scripture or fragmentarily, seeing only "examples" or "instances" of the truth in that sacred history? Does one work synthetically or atomistically? There can be no combining of the two methods. It is either the one or the other (p. 94).

At this point Holwerda takes up the question of the significance of I Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 11 for the discussion. Concerning I Corinthians 10 Holwerda makes these observations. First, Paul speaks of Israel's life in the desert *synthetically*. He does not speak about murmuring in general but about murmuring against the redemptive favors of God — the rock was *Christ*. The application is also synthetically made, for we are exhorted not to make trial of Christ. Second, Paul deals organically with this history. He does not equate Israel with us but declares that we are those upon whom the ends o the ages have come. Third, Paul maintains th factualness of this history and does not regard merely as concrete illustration of a particula thesis (p. 94).

Holwerda emphasizes that I Corinthians 10 dea with *typical* happenings in Israel's history. A typ is not merely a smaller Old Testament picture of greater New Testament truth. Citing many Ge man writers Holwerda points out — correctly — that the type is not merely an illustrative examp but a precursory history, a pre-establishment of th which is to come. He summarizes the argument this way:

> *Thus [it is] not: they have been* written, "illustrative — visibly — pedagogically" for an example for us, *"example"; but: they have* happened (!!) *as . . . pr figuration, of the happenings in the messianic era* (p. 9 Translation mine — C. K.).

With respect to Hebrews 11 Holwerda grants th the writer illustrates true faith by way of recitatio of the acts of faith by Old Testament believers. B he points out that, even here, the specific peculiar ties of the faith of the various Old Testament cha acters are noted and that the issue of this chapter summed up in the statement that God had prepare something better for us *"so that they should n arrive at perfection without us"* (p. 96).

There is much in this analysis of these two pa sages which serves as a necessary corrective to me analogical preaching on the Old Testament. Ho ever, two observations about Holwerda's treatme of I Corinthians 10 are in order. First, Paul do not speak only of making trial of the Lord in I Co inthians 10. He speaks also of lust, fornication a idolatry. He does so because the events in whi these sins are committed were *recorded* for o *admonition* (see verse 11). We shall return to th idea in a later article which will deal with the app cation of Old Testament narrative to the Church.

Again, it is evident that the idea of "type" in th passage is employed in a unique way. The typolog is, in a sense, negative. This is recognized, for i stance, by G. G. Findlay in *The Expositor's Gre Testament, in loco*. The events in Israel's histo here cited by Paul do not prefigure what ought happen in the New Testament Church. That t Church has actually fallen into *essentially* the sa sins is beside the point here. Paul does not empl Israel as a prophetic type of the nature of the Ne Testament Church in this passage. His aim is n to get the Corinthians to see that apostacy is ine table but rather to warn them against falling wh essentially the same temptations face them whi faced the Israelites. These sins of Israel were n *recorded* as prefiguring "happenings in the mes anic era." They were written for admonition, f *warning*.

HOLWERDA'S counsels for preaching on Old Testament history are excellent. Following Grosheide's rules for the interpretation of New Testament history, Holwerda lays down three primary rules which are given here with some expansion of the thought. First, one should carefully establish the position of the narrative in his text in the whole organism of revelation. Second, one should seek out the specific, the unique in each text. Third, one should reckon with the fact that each historical book has its own slant. Each book has a certain objective and purpose.

Holwerda adds four counsels of his own. First, the preacher can avoid fragmenting the history of redemption by serial treatment of Old Testament narrative sections. Second, fundamental exegesis of details is imperative if one would avoid the atomistic treatment of Old Testament history. Third, the preacher should pay special attention to *God's* activity and reckon with the fact that men often are pictured in reaction to God's action. Fourth, the preacher should always note the official quality of the various Old Testament characters under consideration and the degree of their fidelity or infidelity to the official ideals (p. 104).

Holwerda feels that the "law-gospel," "promise-fulfillment" and "what-who" schemes for relating Old Testament figures to the New Testament are apt to be misleading. He prefers to speak of the Old Testament as containing "less" and the New Testament as containing "more." There is growth in revelational clarity until Christ (pp. 104-105). We should note that *this* scheme of relationship may lead to a failure to recognize the administrational differences between the Old and New Covenants. To observe their essential unity and administrative differences fully and correctly is not a simple task.

WE HOPE to return to Holwerda's discussion of the particularly homiletic aspect of his subject in a later article. However, one element in that part of the work under consideration here warrants mention. Referring to Möller's Old Testament Biblical Theology, Holwerda calls attention to four characteristics of the Old Testament in relationship to the New. First, we should note that which is *already present* in the Old Testament. Second, we should pay attention to that which is *not yet* present in the Old Testament. Third, we should note those elements of the shadow which are *no longer* present in the New Testament fulfillment. Finally, we should observe that which is *always and continually* present in both the Old and the New (p. 111).

Preaching on the Old Testament must ever seek to avoid one of two major threats. The preacher tends either to read too much of later revelation into the text or he tends to allow the sermon to stick fast in the Old Testament while he draws a direct *moral* parallel between the Old Testament believer and the Christian. We hope to show how these two perils can be avoided. But we shall first turn to the vexing problem of typology in order to gain a clearer conception of the meaning of Old Testament history for the Church today.

Notes and Letters —

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sound scholarship, is the answer to a highly-pressing problem.

One aspect of the proposed plan needs further clarification, and I should like to see some light thrown on it in an early issue of the *Reformed Journal.* Where is the impetus coming from to organize the "Association" of which Dr. Jellema speaks? The Association is to elect a Board of Trustees; Synod or Curatorium, the academic Senate, the Association and the Calvin Alumni Association will elect one member each to the Board of Overseers; even before this, the faculties of Calvin College and Seminary are to be asked to elect from among their number six or seven qualified men to constitute the academic Senate. Presumably, this request is to come from the Association. But where, and what, is the Association, and how is it to be organized? May we have some suggestions on this important aspect of the problem?

Respectfully,
Richard R. Tiemersma
Grand Rapids, Michigan

GENTLEMEN:

The recent suggestions presented by Dr. W. H. Jellema about the necessity of a university and the method of establishing one are among the most exciting ideas that have appeared lately in the columns of our church periodicals. Convinced that Dr. Jellema is willing to elaborate on certain phases of his proposals, I should like to pose several questions which have occurred to me about them.

I am wondering, for example, whether it will be possible, prac-

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Notes and Letters —

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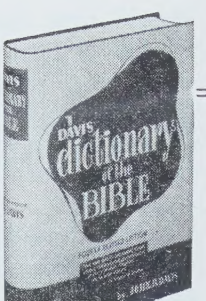
tically, to draw as hard and fast a line between the activities of the Calvin College and Seminary on the one hand, and the University, or the Institute, on the other. No one presumably will challenge the contention that the Institute should be free to explore problems at a high level. But practically, now, since there will of necessity be overlapping of faculty and student personnel, facilities, library resources, etc., will it be possible to maintain the sharp distinction upon which he insists?

Another question I have is this one: Will the studies and research of the members of the Institute faculty differ significantly from their present efforts? Presumably any teacher attempts to keep abreast of contemporary thought and to come to grips with current problems as they relate to his field. As members of the Institute, will the faculty do work essentially different from the work they are now doing? Or will the difference resolve to this, that there will be leisure to do a more thorough and more intensive job? If so, cannot the same purpose be achieved by providing lighter class loads and periodical leaves of absence, without the machinery of another academic institution?

By way of comment, I should like to underscore an argument which Dr. Jellema advances and which seems particularly impressive, namely, his contention that a University was implicit in our educational thinking from the very beginning, and that, although perhaps it is inevitably the last to be achieved in point of time, it is, or should be, first in the logic of our educational theory. It is difficult to calculate the loss we have incurred in lacking a university which could have guided and directed us in our educational thinking at each level. Dr. Jellema has issued the challenge. Who will take up the matter from here?

Steve Vander Weele
Grand Rapids, Michigan



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DEAR SIRS:

I am writing to you concerning two matters.

First, I would like to see the works of Dr. Cecil De Boer collected and published. The suggestion of Dr. Zylstra was an excellent one. Will you place my name on the list of purchasers? I mentioned this matter at our last Ministers' Conference and hope that many more requests will be sent to you from this area.

Second, I want to express my appreciation for the articles of Dr. Jellema in regard to a Calvinistic University. I have two difficulties, at present, with his suggestions: 1) The teaching university, which we hope will come from the Institute, will also have to be financed. Can this be financed beyond the Institute stage without the financial aid of the Church? 2) Do we have men who are ready and able to staff such an Institute? Dr. Zylstra's article "The Writing of Many Books" (?) calls attention to the paucity of material which our scholars are producing. Isn't the writing of books one of the fundamental requirements of a university scholar and teacher? But criticism is not the purpose of this letter. I am desirous of having this discussion continued. We need just the things about which Jellema writes. But if this matter is dropped at this point, the matter may have to wait another one hundred years for realization. Would it be possible to reprint Dr. Jellema's recent articles and have them distributed, in pamphlet form, among the people of our Calvinistic Community? The must be faced with this issue that they cannot avoid it. Don't allow this thing to die! The future of our system of education and the practical application of our Calvinistic principles depends upon the very thing which you desire to effect.

God's blessing in the very worthy cause of Reformed Journalism.

Sincerely,

John Hulst

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